

***Too Much with Too Little:
Shift and intensification in the
work of ACT teachers***

Dr Lew Zipin
University of South Australia with assistance
from Viv White [formerly Executive Director,
Australian National Schools Network]

CONTENTS

1. Introduction: The Broader Social-Political-Economic Contexts of Shift and Intensification in Teachers' Work	Page 2
2. Background and Methods of This Study	Page 6
3. School-Based Management and Its Effects on Workloads and Work Relations	Page 7
4. Effects of Resource Starvation	Page 11
5. 'Performative' Intensifications of Teachers' Work	Page 20
6. Impacts of Shifting Social Contexts in the Lives of Students and Families	Page 28
7. Work Change, Emotional Labour and the Health and Satisfaction of Teachers	Page 36
8. Governance Relations and Teachers' Professional Agency	Page 41
9. Recommendations	Page 48
Acknowledgements	Page 50
References	Page 51

Too Much with Too Little: Shift and intensification in the work of ACT teachers

Dr Lew Zipin, University of South Australia
with assistance from Viv White

1. Introduction: The Broader Social-Political-Economic Contexts of Shift and Intensification in Teachers' Work

Increasingly in 'advanced capitalist' nations around the world, full-time work means over-work. Australia is towards the top in indicators of this work-intensification trend [Campbell 2001, Pocock et al 2001]. This trend exists for workers across employment levels, including executives and managers as well as all colour of 'collars'; and it occurs in both 'private' and 'public' sector industries. However, it is perhaps most substantial in mass public institutions such as education systems. In such sectors, rapid shifts in the nature of work ensue from, among other factors, government-driven waves of 'reform' and 'restructuring'. At the same time, escalating workload results from tight budgets and a rising policy trend toward systemic under-resourcing of complex shifts in work conditions (both government-imposed and otherwise). In the past two decades, we have entered a new governmental era. States have abandoned social-democratic and welfare-state accords, giving way to policy dominated by a centre-right synthesis of 'market neo-liberalism' and conservative cultural 'standards' – henceforth called 'conservative modernisation' in this report [Apple 2001]. In the logic of this policy formation, 'good government' reduces public funding provisions while simultaneously exerting greater control over the directions of public institutions through increasing the criteria tied to what funding is provided [Marginson & Considine, 2000]. Hence, a key thrust of recent policy 'reforms' is to down-size the human and other resources of public institutions, while expecting them to sustain – indeed, improve – services through greater 'efficiency'.

The momentum of this thrust escalates as governments – driven by agencies of global fiscal oversight such as the IMF, World Bank and OECD – are virtually required to shore up budget surpluses by reducing spending on public needs. As well, governments are coerced to lower taxes on corporate sectors, thus losing this major source of revenue for public provision. There is then the political necessity of making such moves appear legitimate to various population groups whose standards of living and job securities are jeopardised (which Habermas [1976] and Offe [1984] have called 'the legitimisation crisis of the state'). Governments respond by 'exporting the crisis down the line' [Watkins, in Smyth 1993], i.e. shifting the blame onto public institutions and their workers. Thus, not only is public institutional work intensified through reduction of resources (especially

staffing), but conservative modernist policy tends to deny that such workload intensification, and concomitant costs to quality of services, are inevitable. Instead, government Ministries tend to make a virtue of the ‘necessity’ of spending less on public needs, deploying rhetorical mantras about how public workers can ‘do more with less’ if they are properly ‘managed’ by institutional leaders, and if they properly ‘manage themselves’ by ‘working smarter’, ‘more efficiently’, etc.

Correlatively, there has been a trend toward quasi-‘privatisation’ of public systems: ‘corporatisation’ in which public institutions are expected to function like businesses. This is accompanied by restructurings of institutional governance in the mode of hierarchical ‘line management’, including significant devolution of responsibility for ‘managing to do more with less’ down to the work level. The logic of such devolutionary ‘site-based management’ – known in school systems as ‘school-based management’ – is the opposite of 1970s and ‘80s policy trends in some states and territories towards local participatory democratic governance from ‘below’, including teachers, students and stakeholder communities. Rather, the agendas that teachers and their school-based leaders must ‘manage’ to achieve are determined and steered from a distance [Kickert, 1991] by Ministries that increasingly lose touch with actual work conditions in schools. (This is not to deny that some bureaucrats who work in Education Ministries are ambivalent about these conservative modernist ideological trends. However, this is not a time in which public service careers thrive through courage to ‘speak up’ to Ministers).

As the distance increases between central government overseers and those in ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ positions within school structures of work and governance (in the ACT, the chain runs from Department down to Principals, Deputies, Level 2 Executive staff, and Level 1 staff who primarily teach), consultation with school staff about policy design and implementation of course declines. Teachers have less opportunity to contribute their grounded professional expertise to policy ‘reforms’ that are increasingly regulated from above through escalating ‘accountability’ regimes. As indicated in the testimonies of teachers in this report, such frustrating governance barriers to their input converge with the exhaustion of excess workload in causing suffering to bodily and emotional health, to family and other sustaining relationships, and to professional identity.

The conservative modernist vision of a ‘new work order’ [Gee et al 1996] may be out of touch with real conditions and sensible aims of teachers’ work; but it is not merely ‘ideological’ in its impositions of ‘performance outcomes’, ‘benchmarks’, ‘quality assurance indicators’ and other ‘accountability’ regimes. Forcefully imposed, these have concrete and substantial effects in the work lives of teachers. Although the intents of such policies are often experienced by teachers as unrealisable in practice (whether right- or wrong-headed), they nonetheless have many unintended consequences which add to the chaotic shift and burdensome intensification of teachers’ work. Such effects converge as serious distractions from a core educational focus on teaching and learning. In addition, they erode time, space and processes whereby teachers might mobilise effective resistance to absurd and excessive work demands, and build professional communities which can mobilise to shift ‘reform’ trends in more constructive directions.

In a time when public sector Unions generally have been induced – by the power of neo-liberal revisions in industrial accords as well as shrinking resources – to play the ‘junior partner’ in negotiations with employing Departments, many branches have had difficulty undertaking more than the ongoing and important work of defending individual cases disputes with management, and bargaining for salaries and conditions. Union branches have generally lacked time to formulate ‘high ground’ policy visions that, mobilised in Enterprise Bargaining, might achieve ‘bigger picture’ political-ethical aims: e.g. decent workloads whereby school staff are able to focus on teaching and learning that justly serves real educational needs of diverse publics while also sustaining healthy and satisfying lives for teachers. The commission of this study by the ACT branch of the AEU is thus salutary. Its aim is to not merely record experiential testimonies of teachers about shifts and intensifications in their work, but also to analyse how these phenomena are situated in broader social-structural and policy contexts. That is, the report pursues an analysis that links teachers’ experiences to underlying contexts which require address in policy/reform that can enable wholesome work and social lives for teachers’ who mobilise professionally around good and viable educational purposes.

The analysis emerges both from the teachers’ words, and from the facilitators of the study, in consultation with AEU officials (as explained in the next section). This report does not avoid stark representations of currently bleak conditions in which teachers struggle against great odds to do their best work; but neither does it counsel passive acceptance of a pessimistic picture. The analysis points toward recommendations, presented at the end, by which the AEU and its membership (hopefully in collaboration with the ACT Education Department) can pursue both relief of teachers’ work overloads, and a professional focus on meeting the educational and social needs of diverse students, families and communities – especially from disadvantaged positions in the social power structure. (As this report will show, teachers increasingly feel the work impacts of these complex and changing needs of diverse population groups; but teachers are struggling to understand their educational responsibilities and possibilities with regard to them.) This study thus aims both to render an honest pessimism of the intellect regarding constructive prospects for teachers’ work in difficult times, and to fuel needed optimism of the will to seek constructive reform of conditions which make the times difficult.

In boosting our optimism of the will, it is important to recognise that, however powerful the trends and effects of ‘conservative modernist’ policy may be, they are not the whole story of the conditions of possibility for teachers’ work, now or in the future. It is also the case that various elements of society – not insubstantial numbers of students, families and communities; teachers; university academics; and, indeed, government bureaucrats – have become sufficiently disturbed by devastating effects of conservative modernist policy, and its failure to meet real needs, that they are ready to act in counter-movements. Following the rise of school retention rates among working class and rural youth (especially males) in the late 1980s and ‘90s – stimulated by decline in youth employment prospects, along with government, media and other campaigns to keep them in school – more recent retention downturns indicate that ‘less advantaged’ youth are voting with their feet as to the quality and value of education offered within

currently narrow ‘literacy/numeracy’ and ‘vocational’ emphases [Teese 2000; Dwyer & Wyn 2001]. Although dominant trends in current policy tend to blame schools, teachers and ‘dysfunctional’ families – and respond with ever more muscular accountability regimes – growing numbers of folk who live and work in connection with schools are joining the argument that conservative modernist ways of defining educational ‘problems’ and ‘solutions’ are ideological sources of people’s problems, and do not represent solutions.

Thus, in most Australian states and territories, coalitions have mobilised among elements of communities, teachers, academics, and government agencies (helped by Labor Party ascendance in some states and territories) in search of more socially just teaching-and-learning approaches. A key argument has emerged that all students – from a full diversity of socio-economic, ethnic/cultural and gender positions – need the educational challenge of highly intelligent curriculum that is made richly relevant through taking their specific life worlds into account. This is a new social justice momentum in education, different from the 1960s and ‘70s in entailing not just inclusion of greater social-cultural diversity in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, but also redistributive justice by which diverse groups gain access to the powers of dominant ‘cultural capital’ [Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Iris M. Young 1990; Delpit 1993; Fraser 1997; Gewirtz 1998] which enable success in schools and other ‘mainstream’ institutions. Moreover, some actors in state and territory governments are beginning to hear the argument that, for these (or any) educational reforms to be viable, they must be resourced adequately, as well as supported through professional development among school staff whose expertise is consulted in designing the PD. Consultation with students, parents and communities – as ‘experts’ in their own experiences and needs’ – is also considered necessary for productive dialogue about what sorts of reforms are needed and viable.

Most significant thus far among such new educational reform movements – which run counter to a conservative modernist narrowness of ‘teacher-proof’ pedagogy, and assessment for quantified ‘outcomes’ (which have yielded neither greater cultural inclusion nor more equitable achievement across diverse groups) – is the Queensland “New Basics Project” [Education Queensland 2001-2002]. This project has developed with government-supported research followed by trials, then ratification for state-wide implementation that includes significant PD to develop professional community among teachers. Also significant, with a family resemblance to the “New Basics”, is South Australia’s “Essential Learnings” approach [Centre for Studies in Literacy, Policy and Learning Cultures 2002] and the ACT Education Department has commissioned, then adopted recommendations from, the “High Schools for the New Millennium” project [Brennan 2000]. The Department has recently allocated resources for a raft of related trial projects, most significantly the “Year Nine Exhibitions Project” [Department of Education and Community Services, ACT 2002]. The latter is now being applied systematically after successful trials facilitated by substantial professional development conducted by the Australian National Schools Network (ANSN) – the same NGO commissioned by the AEU to undertake this study of shift and intensification in teachers’ work. This suggests real possibilities of AEU-Department collaboration in the ACT.

While Department support for progressive reform is thus meaningful, conservative modernist trends still hold powerful sway over ACT and other government educational policy venues. At the time of the focus groups that provide data for this report, these trends were clearly more salient in teachers' experiences of work conditions. When teachers did indicate awareness of more progressive counter-momentums, their comments were favourable regarding curricular, pedagogical and assessment substance. However, they also noted that these counter-trends as yet have not displaced the prevailing weight of 'school-based management' imperatives; and hence, they currently enter teachers' work as add-ons, further intensifying workloads, and limiting the possibilities of substantive and successful application.

In negotiations with the Department, then, the ACT branch of the AEU should act to lead the way, bolstering the will of Department agents to resource, consult and otherwise serve the development of a teacher professional community that can focus on socially just teaching and learning. The AEU should act to promote Department courage to allow the displacement of conservative modernist legacies – especially the distant, hierarchical and non-consultative governance modes of 'school based management', which now weigh so heavily against possibilities of more progressive directions in teachers' work. The Union should act to instigate venues and processes for greater consultation among school staff, stakeholder communities (including students and families) and the Department and, of course, the Union should act to broker de-intensification of workloads, as a sine qua non for enabling professionally virtuous and satisfying teachers' work.

Recommendations towards these ends will be put formally at the end of this report. We must first navigate the complex data of testimony from teachers about how they have experienced shifts and intensifications in their work lives in recent years.

2. Background and Methods of This Study

This study was designed to tap the intelligent capacity of teachers to collaborate in making reflective sense of changes and intensifications in their work. Such shifts and intensifications, and the capacities of schools and teachers to cope, have been researched in many other nations [e.g., in England, Nias 1989; Hargreaves 1994; Gewirtz & Ball 2000]. In Australia, a national Senate inquiry has been held, and there have been substantial academic studies [e.g. Smyth 2001; Robertson 2000]. As a result, much is already chronicled about factors of work shift and intensification for teachers.

However, further studies of such crucial issues in specific locations always add valuable description and insight. There are other questions to pose, involving selected conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches that have certain purposes. Methodologically, The ACT branch of the AEU, in contracting this study, sought to do more than merely chronicle factors of work change and intensification across sectors of ACT public schooling. It wanted to present teachers with a thought-provoking scaffold of questions that would draw on their professional expertise and engage their capacities to reflect on conditions of work in their field of professional practice. Focus groups were decided upon as the method for engaging teachers in these inquiries. In small groups of eight or so participants, facilitators could inject a focus on certain domains of inquiry,

seeking timely clarifications and amplifications while leaving the lion's share of dialogic space to participating teachers. By this means, teachers were able to speak both experientially and interpretively, contributing individual and collaborative comments and analyses with regard to focal domains. Moreover, the participant-centred nature of focus-group dialogues enabled other dimensions of inquiry to emerge and gather momentum, causing the facilitators to re-think and re-phrase their focal questions.

The AEU convened four sector-specific focus groups, consisting respectively of Preschool, Primary, High School (years 7-10) and College (years 11-12) teachers, selected as voluntary responders to random sample mailings to AEU members of the ACT teaching force, ranging across Levels 1 through 3 (with some Executive presence in all of them). The Australian National Schools Network, headed by Viv White, was contracted by the AEU to develop this study. Viv in turn contracted Lew Zipin, Lecturer in Teacher Education at the University of Canberra and an ANSN member who, in his former capacity as Project Officer in a study of academic workloads at UC (sponsored by the National Tertiary Education Union as well as UC Management), had facilitated focus groups with University staff. It was agreed that Viv and Lew would co-facilitate the four groups, and Lew would write a report. Each focus group met once, in 2 & _ hour sessions (with a half hour break midway) during after-school hours in November 2001.

The co-facilitators initially created four focal domains, each comprising a set of prompting and probing questions. The domains were as follows:

- key factors of work change and intensification;
- how modes of school governance affect teachers work; and the possibility of teacher empowerment with regard their work conditions and directions;
- the interface between teachers' work and changing social context factors in the lives of students, families and communities; and
- the impacts of work change and intensification on teacher's health, emotions, professional identity and social relations (both within and beyond school).

Across these focal domains, there was overarching inquiry into how teachers' capacities to focus on teaching and learning are affected by work shift and intensification.

The AEU, the ANSN and the project facilitators are grateful to participating teachers for their contributions of time and intelligence to this project. At the end of each session, the facilitators asked group members how they experienced the sessions, and whether the prompting questions were adequate. In each case, participants attested that they had benefited from this opportunity for reflective professional conversation. They also generally ratified the focal domains and questions posed. Nonetheless, participant teachers exercised a good deal of their own agency to re-shape the dialogue. In and across each of the four groups, further key thematic domains emerged; and connections among them often followed conversational pathways other than those plotted by the initial question-and-prompt instrument. Initial parameters for a study that elicits voices of practitioner reflection are always somewhat arbitrary. It is therefore important, in a report that presents the data of those reflections, to incorporate categories and connections that emerged in conversation among participants who, more than the facilitators, are up-to-date experts in their professional field. At the same time, the

facilitators (as well as the AEU officers who instigated the project) are agents in the dialogue, with expertise, analytic orientations and purposes they bring to bear. The sections that structure the ensuing data presentation and analysis reflect the flow of dialogic interaction among teachers in response both to facilitators and, more significantly, each other.

[In what follows, italics – whether in full paragraphs or within paragraphs – indicate direct quotes from focus group participants. Such passages are followed by parenthetical indications of which focus group – Preschool as PS, Primary as P, High School as HS, and College as C – along with page number of transcript; e.g. (PS7).]

3. School-Based Management and Its Effects on Workloads and Work Relations

As discussed in the introductory section, ‘school-based management’ is the mode of institutional governance that corresponds with conservative modernist agendas for public institutional ‘reform’, especially fiscal constraint and ‘steering from a distance’. In steering so remotely, governments at the level of Departments (or Ministries) are often driven by policy agendas out of touch with work conditions of real possibility. In devolving to the school ‘base’ the responsibility to ‘manage’ entirely too much, with far too little resource support, those in Departments may want to avoid knowing, and thus having to consider, the resultant effects on work life in schools. However, school staff – from Principals and Executives ‘down’ to those who primarily teach – must bear these effects. Staff experience the effects in their everyday interactions and reliance upon each other; and they bear them differently depending on their positions in the school structure of work and governance relations. Often the effects are not those intended by policy makers; and, as staff in the four groups testify, they often yield negative consequences in terms of the focus on the quality of teaching and learning.

* * * * *

In all four focus groups, teachers expressed perceptions of a significant shift in the structure of governance and work relations across levels of staff. This shift is perceived as driven, top-down, by a Department increasingly less consultative, yet more forcefully imposing of policy agendas through ‘performance indicators’ that affect workloads, work roles and work/governance relations among staff in schools. Said a College teacher:

But it is only in the last few years that you feel this top heavy thing coming down where even the Principals have performance appraisals they have to go through, we are going to go through them too. You feel like you are being watched at every step. (C8)

A Primary teacher noted that this shift toward top-down and governance not only steers and controls through ‘performance’ criteria, but is also devolutionary in terms of pressures and expectations that trickle ‘down the line’:

[I]t is dropped on you from the top. What happens is that the Principals go to a meeting and the Principals are told this has got to happen and then they come back, we’ve got to do this and more pressure is put onto everyone. And not only that, they also have their performance things too. We will improve this by this much and this by this much ... I feel very sorry for anybody who is a Principal these days. (P10)

Focus group participants at all levels generally expressed sympathy for Principals, recognising that they are under job pressures, constraints and intensifications at least as great as those 'below' in the school work/governance structure. Indeed, a Level 3 participant in the High School group noted that, while Principals do find themselves *unable to say no to Departmental decrees*, they consequently find that there is *less mutual respect between Principals and senior bureaucrats* – i.e. Principals are coming to see the latter as lacking recognition and/or regard for how impossible it is to satisfy their agendas. (As will later be amplified, teaching staff do not, in knee-jerk fashion, reject Departmental initiatives which they see as having merit; however, they do resent when the Department does not follow through with resources and other needed support.) Along with sympathy, however, staff are troubled by forced shifts in Principal's priorities, and the chain effects on those in positions 'down the line'. Said a Primary teacher:

[T]he Principal is so over stressed and the one Executive person on the staff who is trying to do the Deputy's role is over stressed.... The Principal is not often there because they have so much to do with school-based management that they are pulled out for one thing and another and basically the Level 2 is running the school. (P3)

The term "school-based management" was invoked in all four focus groups, always with a negative valence, signifying what is perceived as a deadly combination of (1) fiscal constriction of the budget allocated to schools (which leads to under-resourcing, and thus intensification, of staff workload); along with (2) devolution to schools of responsibility for somehow 'managing' too meet too many agendas within too little budget. As suggested in the above quote, a key effect of the top-heavy pull on Principals and Deputies is that they lose time and opportunity to fulfil traditional leadership roles within the school, and so must devolve these roles to lower levels of Executive staff. Across all focus groups, concern was expressed for Level 2 staff, who are seen as inundated with work and responsibility, often pre-maturely so in terms of career trajectory. One High School Level 3 noted that many experienced teachers are forsaking promotion, in seeing the Level 2 position as too pressured to be desirable. As a result, younger and less experienced teachers step forward. However, *on that basis what happens is that we are getting less and less experienced teachers who are then taking on that role of leadership and supposedly providing that stimulus for the staff and that support network for the staff in terms of their curriculum (HS2)*. Another High School Level 3 readily agreed:

We are looking at some of our Level 2s coming in their late 20s and early 30s. Some of them find that they have great difficulty with people management, sometimes because they are more focussed on the curriculum, or more focussed on the administration because they see the job more as a project job.... So there is not a lot of leadership and there is not a lot of mentoring being done. At the same time Level 2s are having to deal with all these Departmental initiatives that are coming on board ... There hasn't been sufficient Departmental support and a lot of that has relied on the schools, and that has put a lot on leadership, particularly Level 2s and Deputies.... My concern is fatigue ... I am seeing enormous fatigue and even with young Level 2s coming in and we are going to get

a situation I think when we get towards those people looking at Deputies that those people are just too tired or they are going to leave and go elsewhere. So there is a leadership problem as such, brought on by the intensification of teachers' work. (HS2-3)

This cascading chain of workload intensification and extensification (a widened range of responsibilities) has effects on Level 1 teachers, especially early career staff. Level 1s receive reduced amounts of interface with experienced Executive staff who can help them in their early stages of teaching. As a College group participant put it:

The Executive are being managers in a business ... they are snowed under by the same sort of processes ... It is that top down thing. Everybody is sort of looking up saying come on, what is going to come down next? So the Executive don't have the time to come and help Level 1s because they are working with what are their imperatives and a lot of it is pretty peripheral to actual education. (C12).

Along with this erosion of Executive staff capacity to mentor – which makes it more difficult for Level 1s to immerse themselves teaching, and otherwise learn the ropes of school processes – Level 1s also take on work that had formerly been done by Level 2s and above. As a Primary group member emphasised, this syndrome is augmented in that, as part of the school-based 'managing' of tightened budgets, the number of (more costly) Level 3s and 2s has been reduced:

I think the most major factor that I have seen is since the time I came to Canberra in the '80s. There were in almost all schools two Deputy Principals and up to three or four Level 2s.... So the things that Level 1 teachers are doing now were the role of people who were Executive Teachers and who had an additional time release to do these things.... [N]ow the Level 1 teacher's role has become less focussed in the classroom and incredibly more focussed outside the classroom doing all the things that were once taken care of by the Executive. (P3)

Moreover, budget constraints induce the Department and schools to respond by 'cost-effective' contracting, rather than permanent hiring, of Level 1 teachers. There is thus a good deal of job insecurity among Level 1s. As a result, noted a High School Deputy:

[New Level 1s] don't care what the workload is, they will put up their hand and they will do anything. They know it has got to be done and they know they could get a job out of it. What is happening is that you've got your middle/late thirties/early forties [staff] saying "Well I am not going to do that now".... I have a concern again because they [Level 1s] are going to burnout too.... I am really concerned about what the Department is doing because I think we are all getting quite fatigued and we have to be very careful with our young teachers that they don't get fatigued as well. (HS 4)

It is not only Level 1s whose focus on teaching suffers from this cascade of devolved responsibility for all that 'comes down' to them in the form of non-teaching work. Level 2 and 3 positions are increasingly more loaded with non-teaching work; yet responsibility for teaching remains. Said a High School Level 3 (i.e. Deputy Principal):

I got to be a Level 2 because I believe I was fairly innovative in terms of curriculum and assessment. I was able to provide a lot of system in-servicing and I brought my staff on. I implemented a whole brand new curriculum, was involved in the profiles and all

those sorts of things and what's happened is that as I've moved up the ladder I've found that I'm not developing on those skills I once had.... [B]ecause of the lack of time in my own classes, you revert back and you start going back to "Oh, look I haven't got time to set up this activity". This wonderful environment that you can work at and you know that the kids are going to get enthused about but you just haven't got the time, you need that extra half hour to prepare this activity and it is just for one lesson. So you think, no just go back to the text book. It is really frustrating because I've got to say, as a teacher, I've become a worse teacher than I was. (HS7)

This loss of access to needed Executive help is especially felt in the Preschool sector, where, even before the most recent fiscal reductions, Executive staff were few. Unlike other sectors, preschool Executive staff are not school-based, but work out of a central office, visiting schools if and when they can. Thus, Executive responsiveness in the preschool sector becomes crisis-driven, with Executive staff attending to the most serious fires, but unable to assist with much else. Said a Preschool teacher:

I mean, the workload just increases. It is a Level 2 position with Level 1 pay. Absolutely, being in a Preschool these days. We have all the admin, we have to see to the maintenance, and we have to see to everything that goes on. We don't have anybody on the spot to take that load off us. We have to deal with it as it comes in the door; there is no Principal or Deputy Principal; it is our job.... There has been an erosion of Executive Officers over the period of year where now there are only three for 80 odd Preschools. We are fortunate to see them twice per term and if you are an experienced or more senior teacher like some of us, you try and deal with these issues yourself rather than go to your Executive Officer. (PS3-4)

The pinch caused by declining numbers and accessibility of Executive staff is also especially felt in small schools, regardless of sector. A Primary teacher thus commented:

With the smaller schools, fewer people have to wear the same amount of work. In suburbs where enrolments have fallen and schools fall below that magic 275, where a School can warrant a Deputy Principal who teaches only 8 hours a week, that Deputy job is left to a Level 2. You really are doing the job of a Level 3, you have the workload of a Level 2, but you are the only person other than the Principal. So when the Principal is not there you are the Principal, you are invariably still on class and that is a huge issue. I think until the Union addresses the issue of small primary schools that is going to be a continuing problem. (P3)

A high School teacher also urged redress of this small-school syndrome:

[W]e are going fairly dramatically from six Level 2s to three next year ... I take the point about the Departmental requirements that are being to a certain degree imposed and middle management and the Deputy Principal having to meet these demands as well, and in a small school you have got to prioritise.... [A]s the school gets smaller, general workload increases. You've got X number of things that need to be done in a school whether it be your Curriculum Officers, or whether it be your Indigenous Officers.... [S]o when you target all these particular jobs for other people to do, like a couple of Phys Ed Level 1s will do this and a couple of other Level 1s will do this, etc., that puts a drain on them ... because of these sort of increases [in workload] and prioritising what the

Department wants; but something has to go out of here because you can't pro rate in a small school all the time.... You've still got to have this whether you have 300 kids in a school or whether you've got 500. (HS3)

Finally, a College teacher noted that it isn't only academic staff, but also general and auxiliary staff, who have been lost from traditional roles of assisting the teaching work of the school, in being pulled into a multiplying range of other functions:

[W]e have an increased number of assistants in the school but a great many now are doing things for the front office. When I first came to college we even had people who typed up the tests.... [A]nd they used to have an offset printer and on certain things you even had that printed. There is none of that [now]. (C12)

4. Effects of Resource Starvation

As already discussed, "school-based management" enshrines the sanguine but unreasonable assumption that, through 'better management' and 'greater efficiency', schools can manage more within less plentiful budgets. However, the testimony of focus group staff is that restriction of resources, relative to accelerating and broadening work demands, has reached a point of chronic severity that reveals the fatuousness – the wilful denial of reality – in sloganistic invocations to 'work smarter' and 'do more with less'. Insufficiencies in both material and human resources force staff to spread their efforts thinner, with more intensity and pace, to meet indecently excessive expectations. As consequences of great concern, staff indicate that they experience greater stress, and also a debilitation of focus and quality in their supposedly core work of teaching-and-learning. Within this general syndrome, focus group participants named and elaborated certain domains of especially demanding yet under-resourced workload activity.

* * * * *

The burgeoning 'administration' of everything

Administrative demands were frequently identified by focus group participants as a domain of activity that increasingly encroaches on the teaching-and-learning focus and quality of their work. A College teachers' comment put starkly and simply how resource reduction in itself can turn teaching into a more administrative job:

[B]ecause of the fact that we now have school-based management, smaller classes are very often combined. I personally, I wouldn't say I teach, I run 11 classes. (C4)

In other words, given the limited budget that the 'school base' must manage in the College sector, with consequent staff reductions, amalgamation of classes is forced upon teachers and has increased the number of students for which each teacher is responsible. Although the total number of classes has not increased, the teacher now has less intimate and knowledgeable contact with given students. There is more 'running' rather than 'teaching' of classes, i.e. more administration tied to each student both during and outside of classroom time. The 'normal' load of 11 lines thus become abnormally intensified. Such an effect of class-size expansion is particularly felt in the College sector, since classes traditionally have been smaller there. But in other ways, other sectors feel intensified administrative effects of squeezed resources. As quoted in the previous section, a Preschool teacher noted that, given the lack of Executive presence within

Preschools, we have all the admin, ... we have to see to everything that goes on. We don't have anybody on the spot to take that load off us. It is not only reduction of Executive staff in this sector that yields such effects. Administrative intensification, unrelieved by adequate resourcing, occurs on other fronts as well – for example, in the rising Preschool dependence on parent committees as informal auxiliary staff who fill gaps left by a lack of appropriately trained and appointed staff:

[I]n general it is our administration load that has really increased over the years. We have so many hats we have to wear. It is the communication between every single organisation that we come in contact with right through to the training of every parent in our committee every year. Nobody carries those duties over and it depends on their efficiency. But they are also under an enormous workload themselves, whether employed or not, as some of the parents I am finding now are looking at you saying I am not being paid for this, I am a voluntary worker here. (PS2-3)

Demands that converge to intensify administrative work reach a point where teachers may find it impossible to meet all of them. Sometimes, teachers triage administration in favour of teaching-and-learning work they hold more important. Because pre-school teachers *have an awful lot of autonomy* (PS13) relative to other sectors – i.e. without directly present Executive oversight – they may be able thus to neglect accumulating administrative demands. However, this is not without psychic stress that wears on staff:

[T]here are times when you just don't follow up on some of that admin stuff and you think ... it's near enough and you have taken it home and done all that statistical stuff and you think, I'm not going to do this again, I really don't have time. There are other things I need to do now. So it is dividing yourself between it, prioritising, but I don't think the satisfaction is there as much as it could have been or should be. (PS19)

In other sectors, where teachers are accountable to a 'management' that is present, squeezes that create a need to triage remain but, when acted upon, may lead to clashes which damage good social relations in the school. A Primary teacher gave an example:

One of my issues with my last Principal was she wanted a piece of Paper to put in a filing cabinet and my comeback was I am focussing on my classroom at this point in time. I have too many things happening there, so I cannot get this piece of paper to you. I was dealt with very harshly but as far as I'm concerned my priority is my classroom first ... [F]rom that point onwards our relationship deteriorated because I was prioritising ... All the administrative stuff comes to the back but the pressure is there to get that done and you have got more than one role. You have at least four or five roles within the school at the one time you have to fill. There are not enough hours in the day to achieve this. (P4)

Sometimes passive resistance can enable evasion of administrative work:

I am in a small school and it worked out that with a new Level 2 I was going to be at 3 to 4 meetings every week and so were a number of other people. Eventually people stopped going to the meetings and they died out. For a Level 1 teacher I don't think it is a reasonable expectation, that you finish teaching, have a cup of tea, and go to a meeting and then you have to do your general classroom stuff. (P23)

Meetings were named by many focus group members as an intensifying factor in administrative load. However, most did not indicate that passive resistance was a viable

option. Another Primary teacher responded to the above comment: *I have three meetings that I have to go to every week and then there are others on top of that every week that you can't get out of* (P23). Asked if there are more meetings now than used to be, this teacher responded: *Yes, panels and meetings. ... [W]hen you are a probationary teacher and contract teacher you have to go to your panel meetings once or twice a term* (P23).

Another Primary teacher noted that committee work often entails responsibilities (to colleagues, students and families) simply too compelling to duck:

The IEPs [Individual Education Plans for students with learning difficulties] we now have to develop ... are wonderful in their own right but they do take a lot of extra time. ... [I]f you have a child on an IEP then you have to have a panel meeting. So panel meetings consist of the class teacher, the Executive, the Counsellor, the parents and, apart from that, time to ring and organise the meeting for all of those people and covering classes so that so and so can go to that meeting. Does the class teacher have to do all that organising? The class teacher shouldn't, it's a Counsellor's or Executive's job, but someone has to do it. (P15)

It is worth noting here that, like many others across the focus groups, this teacher is not against what s/he sees as good policy in principle, in this case IEPs. The problem, however, is that this “wonderful” practice lacks adequate time to do it right. The needed time has not been resourced into workloads; rather, obligation to ‘manage’ to find the time is simply devolved to school staff.

In the High School group, an Executive staff member addressed the question of whether time-consuming committees could be cut down to a more manageable scale:

As a Deputy I have tried to curtail the amount of meetings and committees that you have in a school, [but] the organisational culture of the schools is such that we still seem to have them, they're a necessary evil. The NSN [Australian National Schools Network], when they came into our school, talked about working smarter and ... we are trying to do [this] by not having so many meetings, but teachers are their own worst enemy. They create their own committee meetings. (HS6)

Another participant in this group, taking exception to the suggestion that teachers themselves conjure unneeded committees, responded that *working smarter [is not always] really for the benefit of the kids, which is ultimately our primary role* (S7) – i.e. quality of teaching and other services to clientele may well be triaged in the name of ‘working smarter’. Perhaps there are ways to ‘work smarter’ without cost to quality of important services; but it is doubtful that such is possible to a degree that will make any significant dent on workloads. A further danger is that, in burying the ‘work smarter’ mantra, teachers may leave themselves even more vulnerable to claims that their own ‘failure to manage’ their time, not lack of government resource provision, is to blame for their work overloads. (This issue will be joined again later in this report.)

As indicated so far in this section, experiences of increased ‘administration’ signify a range of resource-starved fronts of both teaching and non-teaching work demand that put squeezes on time and capacity to focus on the “primary role” of teaching which benefits kids. Further areas of resource-starved intensification still need to be covered, all of which are at least partly ‘administrative’ in nature and implications, but which are more

usefully identified by other categorical terms. In the remainder of this section, a huge such area – the growth of insufficiently resourced demands for ICT use by teachers – will be treated first, followed by a miscellany of other factors.

ICT Bombardment

In all focus groups, recent dramatic expansion of school ‘info-tech’ use came up early, often and elaborately. It became apparent that ‘ICT’ represents a complex of demands upon teachers which intensify their workloads. That is, information technology is not just something teachers must learn to use in the teaching-and-learning component of their work, but is also increasingly involved in administrating, making oneself ‘accountable’, and other ‘communicative’ dimensions of teachers’ work – sometimes, as a Preschool teacher noted, in barrages that intrude on a teachers’ work time.

[S]ome of the things that perhaps have impacted on Preschool teachers, as much as any other sector, would be the area of information technology and fax machines, partially because you are constantly being bombarded with hundreds of pieces of paper ... across the system. But once you have a quick scan of them and decide which ones you keep and don't keep, it is just time consuming. That's just a little area, a very small smidgen of being bombarded. (PS2)

This time-consuming ‘bombardment’ entails perhaps unnecessary shifts from paper-based to computer-based communication. It is the old story in which a new technology is heedlessly installed, without taking account of needed conditions for viability. Moreover, just because the machinery can bear greatly intensified circulation of information – if adequately resourced – does not mean that staff who interact with the machinery can bear it. And adequate resourcing of the ways in which schools increasingly change over to ICT use is a big ‘if’, as the comments of a Primary teacher indicate:

I think there is also this guilt about checking e-mails or accessing the Bulletin on the computer and I haven't got time now because I know it is going to take 20 minutes before I actually get the spot. It is extraordinarily frustrating and slow and they were the things we used to pull out of the pigeonhole and take home and read when you had five minutes ... but now it is a job in front of the computer and it is a very time consuming job. (P14).

An ICT teacher in the same focus group offered quick agreement:

This is exactly the kind of discussion going on at the ICT sector meeting where I came from [prior to the focus group]. They were saying there is an unreasonable expectation to assume that every teacher will access at 3.00 pm their computer, log on, check their e-mails, look at the Index site, check the “All Staff Alert”, all that kind of stuff. There was a big echoing of that sentiment and basically, they are saying, well, if your school works better in a paper-based way, then it is the Principal's job as manager to ensure that paper copies are made of everything and put out to staff. Another job, another role. (P14)

Although this statement puts responsibility on Principals to steer their schools away from heedless over-use of ICT, sympathetic awareness is expressed that this would be yet another role that the Principal would have to ‘manage’ in her/his workload.

A Preschool teacher tied ICT-related workload intensification, and hence teachers’ resistance to it, to lack of equipment and upgrades needed for effective use:

We have been told that we are working on very antiquated computers and no wonder we don't want to try because it is so frustrating. It is a huge issue. [In addition, we] cannot tie up our phone lines during working hours. We have our computer on the phone line. We can't go into that computer any time when we have children because then we are engaged and our parents can't contact us. (PS13)

Teachers also testify to inadequate availability of vital human ICT resources, i.e. trained support staff. Typically, such staff are greatly over-booked. A High School teacher told of how others who are at all ICT-savvy may be conscripted, without reasonable relief from their own prime work activities:

The pressure [is on] ... IT Level 2 to be responsible for [too much] of these things and that flows through the whole school as well.... [I]f your staffing is so stretched because of your numbers ... it's [an issue] of what can we take out of [other] teachers' workloads ... We will get this other person to do IT as well as their other jobs. (HS2)

One such conscript confirmed the sacrifice of quality in those "other jobs":

Yes, I've only been in the position this year so I am sort of learning this as we go ... My teaching is suffering this year definitely. (HS8).

A College ICT coordinator attested to the impossible load of that position:

With network management I am [expected to be] available to staff and students.... [Y]ou have staff and students coming up all the time wanting help with things and you get absolutely no recess, you get no lunch. You start at 8.00 am and finish bare minimum at 4.30 pm every day. You get no time for yourself. I do all my preparation at home.... You get absolutely nothing done during the day at school. So it is huge hours. (C18-19)

Given all the workload problems of under-resourced over-reliance on ICT, it is remarkable that teachers are not entirely sceptical and resistant. Indeed, some express frustration that the teaching-and-learning potentials of certain ICT programs are lost due to inadequate material and human resources. Said a College teacher:

[S]ometimes implementing some of these things you would really much like to do but ... you don't have technical assistance and you don't have much time to get into the room ahead of time or somebody is there before you using the lab and you have a technical hitch with your computer connection. Then you can't afford to lose that time so rather than waste time trying to implement that new technology you just say, OK, we will do it this way today and you never get back to be able to do the other. (C21)

ICT teaching-and-learning potentials are thus unlikely to be sustained without adequate resourcing. It is understandable, then, that this High School teacher, like many others, is sceptical of hyped 'benefits' and doubtful about real benefits:

[T]here is ... that impression out there that there is a whole heap of things this machine can do that you are not doing. No one's got time to tell you because the computer teachers are racing around trying to fix the machines that are crashing all the time and, again, we have this machine here that we are not really equipped properly to deal with that is doing strange things. It has been brought in to ease our workload but ... I probably spend hours working out how my computer is going to save me minutes. (HS2)

Since school staff thus have reason to be sour about under-resourced introductions of ICT into their work lives, the Department ought to make good faith efforts to consult

staff about how/why ICT is being introduced, and consider their feedback. It should also state and demonstrate a commitment adequate resourcing. Quite the opposite is perceived by many focus group participants. A Primary teacher with school responsibilities for managing ICT infrastructure expressed resentment toward a Department s/he and school colleagues saw as having strongly pushed ICT use while ignoring its own responsibility to resource the necessary infrastructure:

This is a huge issue. People are asking me, when are the schools going to be supported so that it is not an add-on?...When are they going to be resourced so that we can have other people coming around and it is not a teacher responsibility? The Department is putting money into schools for computing but they are not really providing the support. Our school is in the process of purchasing new computers and the amount of hours involved is incredible. Why can't the Department do that? (P24)

A High School Deputy attested to how teaching and learning is jeopardised by vigorous application of the use of information technology [when] a lot of the staff are really struggling still. It is fine to say the expectation is that they will take the ball and run, but in a lot of cases a lot of my staff still don't have that self confidence to be able to do things without a lot of guidance. That takes a lot of time and effort particularly out of class time. (HS2)

It clearly will take far better resourcing, professional development and consultation before Department and staff alike – preferably together – are in positions to evaluate where it makes sense to run with the ICT ball and where it would be wiser to dump it.

Further resource-starved factors that shift and intensify teachers' work

It came up in focus groups that, whereas in the past teachers had a certain number of 'pupil free days' when they did not need to be teaching in school, the 1996 Enterprise Agreement had traded these for '**stand-down days**' in which teachers must be at work to undertake Professional Development. This shift in work arrangements – which purports to 'cut costs' by 'efficiently' providing collectively needed in-service training – also captures staff in what one Preschool teacher called additional *hidden work*; i.e. *in stand-down time ... we [now] have issues like cleaners, cleaning and stripping the floors and cleaning equipment.... There is an enormous amount of housekeeping chores that go on, including checking the inventory (PS8)*. Some staff argued that the collective approach to 'stand-down days' has encroached on what had formerly been more flexible time to be used in for work that individuals each felt they most needed to catch up on or move ahead with. (It needs to be noted here that no one mentioned the 4 days of Easter leave which were negotiated as part of this shift from 'pupil free' to 'stand down' days.)



Complaints about the loss of 'pupil free' days were tied to a larger malaise about shifts in **professional development (or 'in-service')** options. Rather than being more 'efficient', argued some focus group members, PD has thus become more limited in terms of teachers' needs. A Preschool teacher explained, *the part about having no pupil free days is that there are often courses that come up, during term, which we can't go to because we cannot get a day to get there. There is no flexibility (PS5)*. Not only does sector-wide provision negate individual flexibility to seek the PD one specifically needs,

but what is collectively offered is determined in too top-down a manner to reflect the felt needs of many. Said a Preschool teacher: *[Y]ou come together as a sector on those stand-down days, and somebody decides what that is going to be and we are told about it. We do have a little bit of input but I haven't seen many of the ideas I've put in come up* (PS6). Another agreed: *No, I haven't either.... [I]t would be nice to have something to access so that you could also be more specific with your PD, your own local needs* (PS6). Also, the Department sometimes announces sudden in-service that it expects teachers attend – for example, when introducing new accountability regimes – without waiting for a stand-down day. Said a Preschool teacher: *[I]f they are going to have an in-service ... after school or before school ... that again intensifies teacher workloads* (P8).

Teachers thus worry over the loss of what one called *[a]ppropriate in-service* – e.g. *we are getting so many more children with special needs, families with more needs* (PS5), and this teacher wanted PD to help her work with these needs. Despite the loss of ‘pupil free’ time for it, many teachers do still pursue “appropriate” PD. However, they then suffer a further pinch – not just in work time, but in money. Said the same teacher:

It is just really difficult. I don't feel that we ... get enough money spent on our professional development. I have taken PD days myself ... and I am sure others of you have been involved in doing it and we don't get paid anything to do that ... [T]here are some really terrific people around these days who may be able to help ... [with] children who are falling on this very huge spectrum these days, but they cost money for us to be able to go and hear and we are not having that money put into our PD at all (PS6).

Another noted area of weak resourcing, and thus intensified administrative and other workload, is **extra-curricular activities**. Here again teachers perceive a Department that devolves responsibility to the ‘school base’ without acknowledging the real workload involved and thus the resources needed. Said a Primary group participant:

[T]he Department is issuing things like we are expected to run district carnivals for swimming, cross country athletics over and above our daily duties ... [Y]ou need ... time on the phone, ... time on computers, ... time to be negotiating with staff from other schools, organising the students, organising the venues.... [T]his is a huge responsibility, and something I think should be done independently, not done by schools.... I don't think this extra responsibility should be laid on teachers. (P12)

An Executive staff member in the same group agreed, and told of the consequences s/he experienced in trying express that viewpoint to the Department:

I rang the Minister's Department a couple of years back, because a teacher was just going through so much pressure, and said this has got to stop, you have got to sit back and look at the consequences of what your expectations are. I got rapped over the knuckles and told to shut up, back out the door and do not speak up for teachers' conditions. I basically got put back in my place and felt quite threatened by something I felt was justified. (P12)

Teachers do affirm that school should provide both ‘traditional’ and new extra-curricular activities to students. However, given shortages of colleagues – and thus of

anyone with much time to share in the load of such activities – those who do take it on are increasingly left with too little help, to a point where energy and health suffer:

[W]hat is really hard is when you are expected to do something like a camp or an excursion ... You come back the next day after being on 3 day camps. Thursday you have to be back in the classroom teaching 9.00 to 3.00 doing your normal workload after doing 24 hours duty of care and getting about 3-4 hours sleep ... These sorts of things create a huge amount of anxiety, a huge amount of stress and fatigue. (P22)

It is not just the time and energy of an excursion or camp itself that stresses workload. Taking care of increased legal and other administrative factors – without much help from over-extended general staff – intensify loads of teachers who undertake such activities. Said a College teacher:

[W]e are in a situation now where we actually get parents' permission to take 17 and 18 year olds across the street.... That's what we have to do if we want to take them out of the school; so excursions ... have been made a lot harder by that very legalistic approach to it. I know it's a bottom-protecting exercise ... [but] it makes you very much less willing to incorporate into your programs the excursions, which are extremely valuable from an educational point of view. It takes away from teaching enormously. (C4)

~~~~~

In the College focus group, the ascendance of **vocational education in a 'tertiary' mode** was an object of debate, with advocates and critics of the educational value of such curricular programs. However, both advocates and critics agreed that it is a workload blow-out factor. Here is extended testimony from an advocate who was nonetheless intent on graphically presenting all the workload involved:

*I find the vocational area very exciting.... worth the extra work, but ... vocational teachers feel that it has imposed an extra workload ... The fact that all Colleges are registered training organisations has meant that we are competing and operating in an environment of a pool of [for-profit] registered training organisations ... We are constantly having to prove that we are as good as they are. The accountability requirements are very stringent. We go through self-assessment, we go through audits ... [and other] increased evaluation processes; ... in ordinary T subjects you will do an evaluation of every unit, an evaluation of employers as well.... There's collection of data ... [T]here's the requirement to be meeting with industry frequently. There are requirements to attend assessor network meetings. There is need for vocational professional development, for example all vocational teachers need ... a Certificate IV, recognition of current competencies.... [There is] need to also keep up to date in your industry area ... it changes more than something like French or German ... [A]nd the school-based new apprenticeships ... [add work; e.g.] I spent several hours last week chasing up the issue of a student who wasn't being paid by his employer. That is something we wouldn't have been doing a few years ago.... There are lots [more] things I could mention like vocational placements and going out and checking to make sure the kids are there, making sure they're doing the right thing, make sure the employer knows what they are supposed to be doing. (C9-11)*

Given the strong Departmental policy push for VET programs, one might think that such exponential intensification of the workload involved would draw resource support. Not so, however, in an era of ‘school-based management’ of more with less. A group participant asserted: *I am totally overwhelmed by the vocational thing and fought absolutely against it. One of the reasons was that there was three years of seed money and after that you are on your own. I think at the moment we are on our own ... and that is neither here nor there* (C10). Another then affirmed the fickleness of resourcing:

*We had our half line allowance for vocational education teachers last year but because of all of the limitations we have ended up that that’s been taken off us so we are doing all that on top of our normal workload.... I teach the IT vocational course. We are actually doing grades, scores and competencies for all those students. It is a huge amount of work, trying to record those competencies.... It looks great if their schools are giving out hundreds of VET certificates every year and now they are trying to bring in the ICT competencies certificates for [all] college students as well.* (C10)

It may ‘look great’ for the Department; but it will not feel great to VET teachers until the Department resources the work intensification such that it is not ‘on top of normal’.



It has already been noted that, in Colleges, **class sizes** have enlarged, inducing more administrative ‘running’ at the expense of ‘actual teaching’. In the Preschool sector, class sizes are more-or-less steady; but teachers experience intensification factors that, for the sake of good pedagogy, require smaller classes.

*[B]ecause we are getting so many more children with special needs ... instead of having 25 children in a group, I think it should be maybe 20 and then you could get to know your children properly ... [and] deal with their issues without feeling that you are constantly under pressure. And likewise with ... the resource teachers who are there to help you with special needs children; there needs to be so many more of them because we need them. It is a ridiculous workload they have. They don’t have time to do any hands-on work ... [and] that is not terribly helpful sometimes.* (PS5)

Indeed, recent policy has pushed for reduced class sizes, as optimal for quality teaching. However, given inadequate budgets for ‘managing’ the many ingredients that go into good teaching, some unfortunate trade-offs have ensued. As a Primary teacher explained:

*[S]chool based management ... [means that] now the Principal is able to employ ... as many [or few] Executive as they want. Probably a positive side of that is less Executive but smaller class sizes ... and sure our Executive is fairly thin ... but I really think that classroom teachers ... prefer the smaller class size than the extra Executive* (P3).

However, another voice in the group disagreed:

*In our school we have maintained small classes but at the expense of not having the Level 2 doing a full Level 2 role. While I understand the need for small classes, and I think that this is a huge issue that the Union should be pushing, ... [on the other hand] the Principal is so over-stressed and the one Executive person on the staff who is trying to do the Deputy’s role is over-stressed* (P3).

The point is that school Principals should not have to make King Solomon choices for smaller classes at the cost of a thinned and over-stressed Executive, or vice versa. Since both are needed, both should be resourced adequately.



There are a number of other under-resourced areas of workload intensification – for example, increasingly complex time-tabling that thus takes more time – which received mention but not substantial discussion in focus groups, and so will not be elaborated here. There are further under-resourced factors – some already touched upon above, others not yet treated – which will be elaborated in sections that follow.

## **5. ‘Performative’ Intensifications of Teachers’ Work**

The areas of intensification treated in the previous above section are ones which teachers generally see as appropriate work for schools, the problems being that (a) they are too resource-starved to be ‘managed’ well; on top of which (b) failure of government to consult with schools often leads to unviable expectations. By contrast, the areas in this section are what Stephen Ball (2000) calls ‘performative’. That is, they emerge out of conservative modernist efforts to conjure politically useful ideological images of ‘needed educational reform’ – motivated by government’s need to export its legitimisation crisis (discussed in the introductory section) – than by any realistic and ethically substantive purposes for schools. Thus, in many teachers’ perceptions, they are most unwelcome intrusions in their work. If their overt agendas may (or may not) have some legitimacy, teachers can sense that they are compromised by underlying agendas, and prone toward unintended negative consequences.

\* \* \* \* \*

### ***Reform/restructuring***

In general, ACT focus group staff expressed what Lingard et al [2000] call ‘reform fatigue’. That is, because past ‘reform/restructuring’ initiatives have proved unviable as implemented in practice, while at the same time intensifying workloads and, in their unintended consequences, debilitating (rather than improving) teaching and learning, teachers understandably anticipate new initiatives with concerned scepticism. Focus group participants were especially critical about ‘reforms’ launched with fanfare but not much resource support, and soon abandoned according to fickle political winds, showing little commitment to follow-through. Said a Primary teacher:

*There are quite a few points here [regarding] reform and restructuring that are constantly recurring and we take that on as a definite expectation of our work. We see a lot of programs come and go that are a waste of money and a waste of our time because there is less and less time and focus spent in the classroom as ... we are pulled out to run these programs. (P5)*

A College teacher’s tale of amalgamation of two Colleges illustrates how a combination of peremptory, un-resourced and wayward ‘restructuring’ left a legacy of resentment:

*Four years ago we were told that [X] College and [Y] College are [to be] one College [in two buildings], so work it out. No extra funding, no extra staffing ... Student Services,*

*for instance: two totally different ways of operating. Assessment: two totally different ways of operating. Work it out. Solve your problems. Now we have been told ... [that] we are going back to one building. We are now trying to ... amalgamate libraries [etc.] ... I mean, this is a huge waste of time ... trying to sort out these reforms and restructurings.* (C16)

A Preschool teacher likewise told a tale of how a move to new premises – imposed just before the end of a semester *when we are still having children* (PS8) and very busy– was characterised by lack of communication and support, also breeding resentment:

*Our manager had never visited the site and still didn't visit the site even after we had moved, and she didn't even have the courtesy at the first staff meeting to say "How's your move been?" We were absolutely left alone to do the lot of it... OH&S has been looking at it because it is not acceptable ... It is just appalling the lack of support we have had for that move.* (PS8)

A Primary group member told a story of an assessment 'reform' that, in the speaker's opinion, would have been beneficial if only there had been commitment to follow-through:

*A huge amount of money was spent on Profiles ... [T]here was great fanfare and everybody was given a set of Profiles of their own. Then a new group of bureaucrats came into the Department who weren't around when the Profiles were developed. They didn't have the same interest in it and took the staff out of the Department who were working on Profiles and the importance of Profiles in the school is just diminishing and diminishing. They no longer have the relevance that they might have had. Profiles were a tool that I believe could have made a big difference.* (P5)

The import of this testimony is that teachers are not knee-jerk anti-reformers. Even with the likelihood of added workload, they are persuaded to try ideas that would appear to serve good teaching and learning purposes. However, even reforms that one might "believe could [make] a big difference" will be received warily if the Department demonstrates fickleness about them. Clearly, the Department needs to make more reliable commitments to reform initiatives it launches. To sustain the belief and best efforts of staff, processes of consultation and feedback between Department and schools should be established in planning, implementation and evaluation stages of school policy 'reforms' [Taylor et al, 1997].

In the High School focus group, a Deputy told yet another tale of how 'reforms' with elements of good reason, which could win staff on board, instead breed staff resentment due to lack of consultative process:

*[T]o take the ICT competencies, we have been told that year 10s must have 95% [scores] ... yet in our school we talked about another model where we could work with years 7 and 8 ... and actually skill the kids up, keep a database and actually have them proficient ... [by] end of year 10 ... We could actually get them higher than the level they [the Department] want ... [But] there was no consultation with the schools. It is going to be 95% and it is going to be year 10. We don't want to hear what you are doing with years 7 and 8; and that is where the teachers think, we just want to tell you that there's another model we can work with. But there is no listening. It really is directive, a policy directive and you can't move within that. There's an inflexibility that I think staff are*

*really starting to buck at. They are not objecting to ICT competencies ... If the Department listened to what teachers are actually saying, they are actually supporting what the Department wants but they don't like the way there is a lack of consultation, and [refusal to hear teachers' ideas about] other ways that we could do it. (HS12)*

Another moment of High School dialogue also illustrates how policy reforms can have elements of good reason, yet produce unintended and negative consequences, if needed conditions for implementation, and the complexity of possible consequences, are not vetted through appropriate consultation at all stages. A participant raised what s/he called *the three year thing*, i.e. a recent reform requiring that all new teachers move to another school after 3 years, then again after 5 years, then again after 7. Staff recognised that there were reasons: e.g. openness to innovative change can be stimulated through the cross-fertilising rotation of both younger imaginations not set in their ways, and experienced staff whose knowledge of how things worked in other schools might serve in schools to which they move. However, noted one participant, *it impacts on school organisation and culture when ..., for instance, you might have been a ... co-ordinator for two years but we can't have you for the next two years ... And it affects student welfare and parent relations (HS10)*. Said another: *It also cuts down on teaching initiative. [A] lot of teachers [say] 'Well, why would I bother, I'm only here for 3 years and then I'm off somewhere else' (HS10)*. Another said: *Well, a school like ours sort of relies on continuity for some of our clientele, and we've got three teachers in that situation, [including an] English/IT teacher [who] is a guru and at the end of next year he is going... They don't want to go, they want to stay (HS11)*. Another noted: *The situation is worse for ... Maths as there are not a lot of Maths teachers around (HS11)*. Finally, it was said:

*Well, if you are having constant staff changes, of course it impacts and creates more work for those who are left behind. [T]hey have to learn to work with new people and continually show them the ropes at the school ... Every school has its own way of doing things, and ... that creates a lot of extra work as well. If you've got your staff chopping and changing all the time you build up relationships, bang, that's it, so you get somebody else new and you have to go through it all again. Now the job I've got at the moment, I'm the third person in that position ... and the person I am working with is very despairing because ... [it's the] fourth time in 12 months he will have a new person working with him ... and he's a second year out. (HS11)*

If the “three year thing” had reasons, these voices too have reason. It is to be hoped the Department will establish hear and weigh them in evaluating this reform.

A College teacher expressed the tension many latently feel between (1) recognising that schools must change along with changes in society; and (2) concern that the ideology infusing much recent school-change policy tends to blame and control teachers rather than consult their expertise in pursuit of sound and viable changes:

*There have to be changes, society is changing ... life is changing. Education must change and probably continuously, but ... the manager is supposed to look at the people who are doing the actual work and how can we help you do your job better. But that approach isn't coming from ... the management of this Department ... [which says], “You are not doing your job properly, we will make sure that you do”. (C26)*

The suggestion here is that ‘reforms’ fail not because of staff negativity, but because their professional experience and expertise are not tapped by “management of this Department”. It is of course a basic truism that enlisting the constructive agency of those who will implement a reform is crucial to enabling the reform to succeed [Sarason 1971]. Following the above comment, a Deputy in this College group underscored the point:

*I don't think that one should draw the conclusion that teachers are always resistant to change. We've got four teachers who are doing two nights a week from 5.00 to 9.00 ... doing a Diploma in IT. They have taken that on as extra work. I don't think we should go down the path of thinking everyone is resistant to change, everyone's resistant to extra work. If people see things as worthwhile they will do it. (C26).*

To sum up: Despite understandable ‘reform fatigue’, teachers are not resistant to reforms which strike them as containing good sense. However, teachers believe that to be both good in principle and viable in practice, a reform must emerge from due consultation which includes their professional expertise in the design, implementation and evaluation. It also requires adequate resourcing and follow-through on the part of those in governmental power. These are altogether reasonable expectations.

#### ***Assessment/Accountability***

As discussed in the introduction to this report, the ‘conservative modernist’ trend in educational policy forcefully promotes ideological notions of ‘standards’, measured as ‘outcomes’, for which schools and teachers are ‘accountable’. Such narrow ‘measures’ of student learning are, by specious cause-effect inference (typically ignoring obvious explanatory factors such as the socio-cultural background of school clientele), taken also as measures of teacher/school ‘performance’. School staff in the focus groups expressed scepticism and resentment toward this ‘performance outcomes’ regime of ‘accountability’. Said a member of the College group:

*Looking at ... things that have impacted on me, and on people in my staff ... the approach to outcomes in education ... is one of the most ill-informed educational ideas. It seems to be brought in because people feel that our marks can't be justified interstate, so it's sort of almost a hearsay reason and we have been racing around and getting all this stuff done for Moderation day for a purpose that keeps changing. We have been going through the process now for two years ... and people in my staff feel it is an utter waste of time, and when it comes around to assessment time and we are trying to get all the stuff together it actually makes us seethingly angry because we don't feel there is any educational rationale for it. (C1-2)*

As this staff member indicates, college Moderation Day has expanded into an intensive ritual of ‘data’ preparation of multiple sorts. Again, it is important to appreciate that teachers do not reject the principle of Moderation. Said a College teacher:

*I think that, with Moderation for example, it is essential that we do have right across the system comparability of grades. I think that in itself it is a very worthwhile goal, but what we all find very difficult to cope with is the waste of time in preparing the materials or the fact that it takes such an enormous time. (C6)*

This suggests that it is not just the intensification of preparation that is resented, but that some of it is time-wasting, i.e. ill-advised. Again, this has to do with lack of consultation with teachers about what makes for purposeful assessment:

*I don't think anyone would deny there is increased work in preparing for the Moderation material. One thing that made most of the people in our faculty cross was that in fact if all the time and effort that went into it was really purposeful you might not resent it quite as much. [For example,] in the case of our areas, ... for the five sets of materials that were prepared for the day, we looked at three from each of the colleges ... [so] it was a total waste of time doing those other two, and that was every assessment item for that portfolio, not to mention bringing the practical things along which has got its own sort of problems. (C8)*

Lack of consultation regarding purposeful use of the day itself is cause for further resentment. A teacher noted that, whereas Moderation Day had once involved *reading and thinking/discussing* – i.e. opportunity for development in a context of professional community – it now *has become a ticking exercise* (C8). Another followed: *It is done very much like they were trying to keep us busy on the bureaucratic part so we didn't actually think or vocalise about our lack of real purpose for the day* (C8). The first voice then elaborated further, regarding a recent Moderation Day:

*[T]here was no consultation with us about what we wanted in terms of moderation.... They brought somebody special in from Queensland, a new consultant who told us what we were going to do and how we were going to do it ... you have all these pieces of paper, you don't know what you're doing ... the language is very bureaucratic ... And so, instead of being a community, a group of teachers getting together making a decision about how do we want this to go, it is people from the top saying this is how you do it. (C8)*

Following this, another voice added: *The same thing is coming in the V grades. It has been happening in the last few years* (C8). Said another: *It started with Strands, though, so it has been going for about six years* (C8). Another then commented (cited also in section 3): *But it is only in the last few years that you feel this top heavy thing coming down where even the Principals have performance appraisals they have to go through, we are going through them too. You feel like you are being watched at every step* (C8).

This surveillance aspect of the rhetoric and practice of 'performance appraisals', with effects not just on workload but also morale, was echoed in other focus groups. The High School group saw active discussion about how *accountability in terms of measurable outcomes [and] quantitative benchmarks are system demands* which have made workloads *very intensified in the past few years*. Furthermore, *pressure on staff to satisfy outcome measures*, especially in areas of *numeracy and literacy, ICT and Indigenous education*, have been *under-resourced*. (Italicised phrases in the previous sentences are from author's notes during a temporary electrical black-out.)

In the Primary focus group, teachers expressed distress at how new accountability regimes not only intensify workload, but disrupt teaching and learning, with negative effects on the morale of both teachers and students. Said one participant:

*Considering accountability ... the Departmental testing that comes in .... is a huge disruption on time, it's a huge disruption on teachers' efforts. You are spending a year in*

*a classroom putting together self-esteem of children, evaluating on a visual, oral and written level. You get one test that is sent out and, as a result, you get children who are suffering from self-esteem from that point onwards. It has taken you eight months to build them up to a productive work level and with one test the whole thing is just completely destroyed. They are not taking in [enough] variables; the tests aren't broad enough. (P6)*

This was followed by many voicings of similar distress about effects on student self-esteem. A sense of unjust threat to teacher esteem and reputation was also expressed in many comments, such is the following:

*[Y]ou could have children who are having a situation in their family ... [e.g. a] parent has left home divorcing, and none of these social aspects are taken into consideration yet we are hauled over the lines, put in meeting after meeting: 'Why is this happening? Why aren't you teaching numeracy?' ... [It's] the result of one test [without] considering the whole picture. (P6)*

Another observed that such accountability regimes unfairly threaten schools as a whole: *The school is being judged no matter what anybody says (P6)*. Another underscored the illusory image-selling aspect of such regimes of 'performativity': *Schools themselves say we have to do well in this, we have to look good; and so teachers give in and teach to the test (P6-7) – i.e. at cost to more meaningful curriculum*. Commenting on the intrusions of a particular test regime – *ACTAP* – one teacher summed up a number of negative effects:

*[T]he whole school program changes ... over that three or four weeks period ... because people are reassigned different roles because of what is entailed in the testing. You are losing days of teaching time ... It is quite a disruptive thing to the school as a whole and ... because of the ... things that aren't taken into consideration ... [it] is destructive for the ... teachers on a personal level and for students. (P7)*

As in the College sector, Primary teachers also find workloads acutely intensified by the number and scale of reports that current accountability regimes demand. Said one:

*Can I bring up the issue ... of reporting? We do three outcomes based reports in Terms 2, 3 and 4. We have an interview with parents in Term 1 and an optional interview at the end of Term 2, but ... writing these reports [is] a major load that has come onto teachers. Even the skills of writing them so that they sound and look right and the parents know what we are talking about.... Adding onto that ... there are so many different assessment things ... coming through now. These new beautiful ways of assessing, ... learning journeys, ... portfolios, three way interviews ... these things are fantastic, but ... schools ... are taking them all on, not being able to let go of some.... [I]t is just taking so much time, and it is quite stressful ... [W]e have to learn where to draw the line ... and that's where it comes back to saying no. (P9)*

We should again note that teachers are not reactively anti-assessment/accountability. They recognise that such are due processes when answering to just purposes in which they believe. The above-quoted teacher voices pleasure with "new beautiful ways of assessing". However, she also underscores the problem that these are workload add-ons to assessments which are already too intensive. Such workload intensification kills the pleasure, and evokes understandable impulses to 'say no'. It is likely that, unless the

‘new beaut ways’ gain greater currency by displacing ‘old ways’, they will be resisted by many teachers who, not having tasted their ‘beauty’, anticipate them mainly as add-ons. In the current contradictory climate of ‘reform’ (see the introductory section), the ACT Department sponsors both the ‘outcomes based’ tests pushed powerfully by conservative ‘standards’ advocates, and the more progressive ‘new beaut ways’. The Department might win good faith from teachers if it entered into consultation with them, and with other interested constituencies (i.e. parents and communities), about which assessments work best for student learning, and thus should be given professional development support and room to take hold.

Intensification of both workload and psychic-emotional stresses of ‘accountability’ through assessment/report regimes are more fully appreciated when it is recognised that not only government, but also parents, are caught up in the application of increased and often contradictory pressures on schools and teachers to be ‘answerable’. While they ideologically obscure real sources of people’s problems, government ‘accountability’ regimes are, after all, responses to real concerns of families and communities who, in current political-economic conditions, experience increasing insecurities about their kids’ futures. Families thus want greater assurance that their kids will have chances for academic success sufficient to achieve access to decent tertiary and employment options. (Insecurities beset not only the ‘under-advantaged’ classes, but also the ‘over-advantaged’ whose class position entails a competitive ethos that heightens in less secure times.) Parents also care about their kids’ needs for social-cultural coherence, identity and self-esteem. All this is brought to bear on teachers. The Primary teacher who, as quoted above, expressed appreciation for ‘new beaut ways of assessing’ then said further:

*I also think [we need to be] training parents that times have changed so, if a school wants to take on learning journeys, all these things, [there should be leeway to do so]. But parents still want that big major report at the end of the year or half way through the year. It is just too much. I feel that is taking on a lot of teacher workload, that’s intensifying it as well. (P9)*

In the Preschool sector, teachers find that shifting needs and concerns of many parents include downward intensification of when education begins. That is, parents increasingly see Preschools as *the first educational pit stop* (PS4). Some thus bring new pressures to bear in terms of what they perceive (to some degree aptly – something teachers may forget when under workload pressure) as their kids’ need for early good starts in their educational trajectory through schooling. Noting this pressure from parents (but perhaps not the real concerns behind them), a Preschool teacher said: *Sometimes their expectations are almost impossible ... They don’t really seem to understand. They almost see it as starting school: ‘When are you going to teach my child to read and write?’* (PS 17).

In the high school focus group, in a discussion about whether and how teachers could undertake ‘work smarter’ strategies to reduce workload, one participant suggested that staff in a school could agree to undertake fewer and less extensive reports. Another rejoined: *In the school I am at now ... they are absolutely held onto. We cannot possibly not write reports* (HS6), to which another voice added: *We are just introducing year 10*

reports ... [W]e never had them before, but we are having them now instead of references (HS6). One of the facilitators then asked group members generally if they thought this is coming from the teachers themselves – i.e. are teachers holding on to habitual ways of working which they could let go of. A ‘work smarter’ advocate said, *Absolutely*. However, this brought challenge from another participant in the debate:

*Some of it is ... coming from the parents: ‘We expect you to supply this to our student, why aren’t you?’ And the school goes: ‘To keep our numbers we probably should, and so you then organise a committee to work it out. We are introducing a Band program in years 7 and 8 next year as a direct response to parents saying: ‘You don’t have a Band program? I’m taking my child somewhere else’ ... [W]e’ve spent six months putting Band on line for next year. It is nothing to do with the Department, it’s all parents.* (HS6-7).

### **Marketing**

The above statement expresses a double bind. On the one hand, with inflating workloads and thinning resources, it may not be ‘working smart’ for a school to sustain current levels of reporting, to undertake a Band program, etc.; but on the other hand it becomes necessary to do such things in a context of ‘market competition’ where schools now struggle to “keep our numbers”. Thus ‘selling’ the school becomes an area more performative than substantive which nonetheless intensifies teachers’ work. A College teacher expressed this amply:

*Another factor that I think impacts on our workload is we are operating in a system of drift to the non-government schools, [causing] declining student populations [in public schools], which has led to what I perceive as much more emphasis on marketing than when I first came into teaching. We are really all competing with each other so vigorously and with the non-government schools in particular in enrolments. So that means that at certain times of the year ... so much time goes into administrative tasks such as getting permission notes for students to come with you to local high schools to deliver talks, preparing publications that perhaps we didn’t used to prepare, and having other sorts of information sessions. I believe this has added to our workload quite considerably.* (C3)

This College teacher, from a late-career vantage point, testifies to a recent and significant intensification of public relations and other ‘marketing’ work of teachers, in parallel with government policies that put ‘public’ and ‘private’ schools into competition on terms increasingly favourable to independent privates. A consequent drift of students into private schools in turn pushes public schools – to sustain funding and even institutional survival – to compete for the smaller population of students remaining in the public system. The acute intensity of PR and other marketing aspects of college VET programs have already been discussed. Nor are Preschool and Primary sectors – which are now de-zoned – immune from pressures to compete out of concern that parents might otherwise move their kids to other schools (private or public). However, the ‘private drift’ effect of intensified competition registers most acutely in the High School sector. In the High School group, responding to the teacher’s tale of a Band program driven by parent demand, another voice indicated the growing PR imperative:

*That reminds me of another factor and that’s the PR and the work intensification that schools engage in because of the PR, and in the ACT we are very competitive amongst our*

*high schools. There is a lot of work that goes out on publications, and going into Primary schools and meeting and greeting parents, and once again it is necessary but there is a lot of time spent. (HS7)*

It is important to clarify what this teacher means by ‘necessary’. S/he is **not making a virtue** out of the ‘necessity’ of PR work. Focus group participants resoundingly expressed discouragement with a rising amount of work activities that performative pressures create as ‘necessary’, yet which otherwise lack substantive value, and which undermine teaching-and-learning focus and quality. It is a case of quasi-market competition: the flogging of images of ‘products’ that are not substantial and thus useful in any real sense of meeting peoples’ needs [Whitty 1997; Ball 2000]. Such marketing of images must manufacture claims of a ‘higher quality’ product than competitors. The tragedy is diversion of resources away from what is needed for actual quality education. For example, every school now must flog a ‘gifted and talented’ program, and must fill it with increasing numbers of students whose parents demand their kids’ inclusion (out of understandable concern for how their kids’ future prospects are linked to ‘winning’ in academic ‘market’ competitions.) The ‘market’ logic is that, in seeking to win the competition for ‘consumer choices’, each school is driven to improve the quality of its educational offerings, thus driving up quality across the system. Against this neo-liberal ideologic, a High School teacher explained how the real trade-offs, in terms of ‘quality’, amount to a decided loss of educational quality when under-resourced schools put too much into the ‘selling point’ of a ‘gifted and talented’ program.

*One class is probably my dumping ground where ... I've taught it for eight years.... I know I can go into that class and I can wing it, and I have been doing so all year, basically because I can never plan for it because ... half my day is spent with doing student management issues or doing other issues ... and the other classes I am teaching are pretty high level. The gifted and talented year 10 SOSE class ... takes an inordinate amount of time, but I feel it is really important to put a lot of energy into that ... [to] turn around the image of SOSE at my school which has been pretty poor, especially with our gifted program ... So I really want to put a lot of effort into that and some areas have to be sacrificed unfortunately and that puts a lot of pressure on me as well because I want to do the best I can (HS8-9)*

This teacher wants to “do the best” for all students. However, s/he feels that s/he, and the school, must respond to perceptions from a powerful and demanding portion of real and potential ‘customers’ (i.e. parents) who want “gifted” programs of “high quality” for their kids. Thus, a perceived need to upgrade the image of a program from “poor” to “high level” induces this already over-worked teacher to triage time and energy by the “unfortunate sacrifice” of a “dumping ground” elsewhere in the workload (i.e. a class of ‘less gifted’ students who thus have greater need of teachers’ planning effort). This illustrates unintended and negative consequences when curriculum reforms are driven by the ‘performative’ logic of conservative modernism. In this case, along with being under-resourced, the ‘reform’ is based more on a performative ‘image’ of what needs to be offered than on any educationally substantive ‘necessity’ or ‘value’.

## 6. Impacts of Shifting Social Contexts in the Lives of Students and Families

From some statements by teachers in the previous section about pressures brought to bear by parents, it might seem that teachers see parents as having very little good sense about how schools can and should meet their kids' needs. From the overall focus group data, it would be more apt to conclude that teachers have contradictory consciousness about the needs expressed by families in interactions with schools. Teachers can be both sympathetic and judgemental, sometimes within the same statement. One of the most difficult tasks for public institutional workers is to keep in mind the broader social contexts – both ideological and material – which condition the 'needs' that diverse clientele experience and bring to bear [Fraser 1989]. Coping with work pressures internal to school micro-contexts can induce teachers not to see family concerns within a macro-contextual 'big picture', but rather to 'blame the victim'. Schools thus must communicate effectively with the diverse range of families and communities whose children attend the school. In the process, school staff must appreciate how shifting social contexts that threaten well being and future life chances are shaping many families' perceptions of how schools can/should respond to their needs.

Many students and families currently experience new and intensified needs, social as well as educational, stemming from shifts in cultural, political and economic contexts of their lives. These shifting social conditions indeed affect kids' attitudes and behaviours in schools, as well as parents' expressions of expectation and concern, all of which impact on teachers' work (in ways that vary depending on class, gender, race/ethnic and other positions of school clientele). It is understandable that school staff may resist under-resourced workload intensification that accompanies this. Staff also have reason to resist conservative modernist ideological constructions of 'needs' – e.g. 'work skills' for 'the global economy' – defined in ways that stratify diverse groups of students within schools (e.g. 'academic' and 'vocational' streams) and which do not yield equitable life-chances for students from diverse backgrounds. It is nonetheless crucial for school staff to appreciate that kids and families deserve to have their felt needs and concerns heard and addressed. It is likewise imperative that the Department acknowledge its responsibility for resourcing consequent workload impacts. It is crucial that all interested parties – teachers, communities and government – enter into mutually informing consultation about what are the substantive needs of students, parents and communities to which schools can aptly and viably respond.

\* \* \* \* \*

A Preschool teacher expressed the positive/negative ambivalence that many, across the focus groups, seemed to feel in response to recently intensified family expressions of needs, especially those which teachers perceive as 'social' (as against 'academic') in nature.

*Yes, that's a dual edge sword, isn't it? The contact we have with parents is particularly good because we see most of them everyday. That is one of the really positive parts of our work, but it is also that incredible drain ... because you are often dealing with the problems of a whole family, not just one child. In fact, I often joke with a friend that I*

*often feel more like a social worker/counsellor. We have a huge role in that area and it is emotionally draining. (PS4)*

A facilitator then asked: *Is that increasing, that social role?* The teacher replied:

*Yes, it is huge and you sometimes have parents that use you as a crutch, and you have to work out a strategy so that you don't end up in that role the whole time ... I am not a Counsellor and you need extra help. It is just knowing when to stop them and when not to, but sometimes they are very manipulative ... They want your undivided attention and then everything else falls behind ... They need your understanding about their child. They are just anxious but it seems to go on all year and everything else gets put aside. (PS4)*

Another teacher then joined in the discussion:

*I think this situation has intensified. Why? I think there are more children with needs these days. Whether that is because the family dynamics [have] changed – I'm not quite sure why this has happened, but there do seem to be more children that come in with needs ... It does seem to be more and more, and at the same time we don't have the support of our special needs teachers who are spread so thinly that they haven't got the time to see us more than maybe twice a term if you are lucky. (PS4-5)*

In this dialogue, we can see ambivalence between sympathy for family 'anxieties' about their kids' 'needs', and a tendency toward annoyance with parents for what are perceived as their uncomprehending and/or excessive expectations. We can also see a blurry vision of where the 'social' nature of 'needs' intersects with academic 'special needs' regarding learning capacity. The statements quoted above suggest some sense of recognition that there may be broader social contexts behind whatever "family dynamics" may be involved in the phenomena of "more children that come in with needs" and more parents coming in with anxieties. However, they shy away from sociological analysis of "why this has happened"; and there are also hints of a tendency to 'blame the victim'. Later in this Preschool session, a facilitator probed for teachers' analysis of the social contexts of kids' and parents' "needs", asking whether families of Preschool kids are generally *[p]oorer or more middle class people?* A teacher answered: *More middle class, I'd say.* Another then said:

*We also have a lot of families that are real battlers, and we have to deal with a lot of those issues that come with that socio-economic group. We also seem to have to deal a lot with custody issues, marriage breakdowns and sole parents ... [which] is definitely something that is on the increase; and blended families and children that live in two households, and how you communicate between those. That's an extra workload too because you have to think about that, and which house is the child in this week, and making sure that both parents, if they want to be equally involved, you have to make sure they are equally involved. (PS17-18)*

This statement expresses a non-judgmental sense of broader social conditions behind family dynamics that enter into teachers' work with families in schools. We can read an implicit analysis that dynamics of rising divorce, custody issues, etc. among battler families are contextualised in a bigger picture of socio-economic shifts which are not working to the advantage of that "socio-economic group". However, in other teachers' statements, expressed perceptions of families in plight, and how this affects teachers'

work, often slide into judgmental inferences in which families are blamed as if the ‘dysfunctional’ causes of their own problems. In the Primary group, one teacher remarked about the intensification of *our roles as counsellors on a day to day basis, not only of the children trying to work through their problems, but with their parents. They are crying out for help, needing strategies and skills to manage their children. They come to you for help or come to abuse you* (P16). Another voice in this group, perhaps worried about judgements implied in portrayals of parents that sometimes “‘abuse you” and lack “skills to manage their children”, responded: *We have people crying out for help, not with abuse* (P16). To this, the first voice replied: *Yes, teachers crying out for help* (P16), thus tipping the negative vision of incompetent parents whose damaged kids must unfortunately be suffered by teachers.

As already noted, teachers may hold ambivalent and contradictory feelings about parental expressions of need. They are also able to stand back, analyse and re-think their reactions formed in the heat of workload pressures. For example, following the ambivalent constructions of parental ‘needs’ expressed in the dialogue quoted above, a facilitator pushed the question: *Are we blaming the families?* Picking up the gist of the question, a teacher replied: *So you’re saying that we might sit back and say it is due to the parent that this child is like this. Well, there are a lot of notions around behaviour management. We might say a bit of decent parenting would fix their problem; but we [also] go deeper than that* (P20-21). This was followed by many voices of agreement that, while work pressures may induce tendencies to blame parents, teachers do understand that students and families have legitimate needs which schools must address; for example: *Although we are all saying the job is sort of overwhelming, and all these other things are impinging on it, we are still all trying to do just that* (P21). Another said: *Being able to turn around some really hard cases for families and parents ... I mean, that is enormous [satisfaction]* (P21).

However, as indicated in the above play of comments, teachers’ perceptions of the ‘family dynamics’ of parents and their kids are often associated with notions of ‘behaviour management’. This often implies that, because parents have failed to instil behaviour patterns suitable for educating kids, teachers must give effort to ‘managing’ in the sense of imposing order on unruly behaviour, taking time away from educative work. (Discourses of ‘behaviour management’ currently abound in teacher education programs, government policy, media representations, etc. Teachers do not construct ideas of ‘poor parenting skills’ and ‘child behaviour problems’ all by themselves.) In focus group discussions of new sorts about ‘anti-social behaviour’ among students, participants sometimes tended to put negative valences on notions of students who ‘need managing’. This was linked with a construction of ‘social needs’ as set against ‘academic needs’, i.e. dealing with the former placed a burden upon teachers at the expense of the latter. In the flow of dialogue quoted in the paragraph just prior to the one above, a third voice interrupted the portrayal of parents as ‘needy’ and ‘abusive’, redirecting discussion about a growing ‘counselling role’ onto the needs of students themselves (rather than parents), and how this affects workloads:

*Well, that is true, that the counselling role is huge. Every day after recess, how much of your time do you spend, and lunch time, and then after school? And then you start your other work. If there could be a camera in the classroom and you could be recorded during the day people would see that there was not a second where you can just stop. There is always an issue. (P16)*

Another voice then added: *And, unfortunately, ... you want to get to the children academically but you do have to get to them socially as well (P16)*. This can be read to say that ‘getting to children academically’ is the proper job of teachers; and having ‘to get to them socially as well’ is unfortunate in that it improperly takes away from time on academic tasks. In other focus groups, discussions also presented this perception that rising student behavioural manifestations of social ‘needs’ or ‘problems’ burdened teachers unfairly, and took away from a proper focus on academic work. In the High School group, a teacher commented on the intensification of workload factors stemming from

*outside of the school and nothing I can actually affect. It is the social and the welfare issues, and to be able to teach in my classroom I have to deal with the welfare issues first, which take up all of my spare time, which means I don’t have time for the teaching part of it. I have no control over the social welfare of these children outside of school but the effects of that go through the whole school and it is something that every teacher then has to deal with and [which] takes away from their teaching time. (HS5)*

A facilitator then asked: *So, are welfare issues greatly increased? Over what kind of period are we talking?* The same teacher replied: *Dramatically.... Over the last 2-3 years.* The facilitator asked: *What sort of issues?* The teacher replied: *Family crises, drug issues, breakdown in family unit, dealings with the law, court orders and just the general health and well being of students.* Another added: *We need to put mental illness in there as well.* Another said: *The stress the students are under as well I think reflects in their attitude and in their work at school.* The next comment was: *You are going beyond those realms I believe that we were ever asked to do as part of our duty of care and it is becoming more so like that. You are reaching into the community, assisting parents who have great difficulty parenting.* To which another added: *Aggressive parents are the other thing. Aggressive parents take up a lot of time. They either accuse you of causing this for their child and it is your fault, or they look at you with tears in their eyes just saying “What can I do? How can you help me?” (HS5)*

Again, we hear ambivalence, with hints of recognition that social context factors put new pressures on families and kids; however, the discourse too readily slides into blaming parents, categorising them as ‘aggressive’, as lacking ‘good parenting skills’, as burdensome whingers. The latter view correlates with perceptions of certain students as individual cases (i.e. not contextualised in social-structural conditions) of ‘behaviour problems’ which make them uneducable (and thus merely to be ‘managed’ in schools). The strongest expression of this perceived link between ‘bad’ student behaviour, and blameable parenting, was expressed later in the High School focus group. One teacher said: *I have noticed a change. I get shouted at now by the kids whereas in the past I have never been shouted at.* A facilitator asked: *Why do you think it is happening now and not*

before? This teacher answered: *I wonder if it is me.* Another opined: *I think it is more socially acceptable, that's the problem* (HS14). This was followed by another's assertion of a rather simplistic (i.e. non-sociological) cause-effect link between bad parenting and bad student behaviour:

*Unfortunately a lot of the students want to take the rights but don't really want to accept the responsibilities, and dare I say they pick up a lot of these patterns from their family about you stick up for yourself and don't take any crap. These are parents telling their kids this, so we have them for six hours of a 24 hour day, and we are trying to get some sort of normality to a certain degree, socialisation process or pursue the right from wrong scenario, moral obligations and things like that. Then they go back home, that's if their parents are home, and there's another 18 hours out there, then they come back* (HS24-15).

However, another voice then steered the discourse away from an individual psychology framework for conceiving student behaviour, injecting a more social-psychological view: *Aren't we talking here about alienation with adolescents and lack of motivation as much as anything?* The understated sympathy and sociological analysis in this reply should be developed through in-service work with teachers who tend to blame victims. However, teachers do not typically blame parents and kids as bluntly as in the passage above. In the College session, tendencies to think more sociologically emerged in a dialogue that began when a teacher noted *rising concern for personal safety which I think is affecting how some people are feeling about the job* (C14). Asked to amplify, the teacher said:

*Well, in a College it is just basically physically big students who are deciding whether they will follow instructions.... [W]e say that a lot of the onus for behaviour is a student's personal issue ... and if they decide to be poorly behaved then they will. And there are teachers who do feel intimidated.* (C14-15)

This again expresses an individual- as against social-psychology framework for viewing 'behaviour problems' as 'individual choices' rather than manifestations of social-structural conditions. A facilitator then asked if others in the focus group felt that *behaviour [is] changing in terms of violence?* A teacher replied with the single word *Vandalism*. Another said: *I think language is more direct and unpleasant than it was* (C15). However, another joined the discussion with a statement more reflective of sociological understanding: *[O]ur retention is even greater because young people can't be considered as unemployed until a certain age and I think we have to account for that, and I find it very interesting that now we have vocational education and we have less jobs* (C15). We could read this to express the insight that vocational education, as currently pushed by government policy, has less to do with teaching meaningful 'job skills' than with a latent ideological agenda of delaying job market expectations among young people who used to leave schools for work after year 10, but now cannot find apprenticeships. A facilitator asked for clarification: *So are you saying that some of the behavioural issues are a result of the higher retention rates of students who used to not stay in school?* The teacher answered:

*We are confronted with a lot more problems. I feel, too, with a lot of kids who seem to be having a lot more problems, that ... [they] are not living at home. We do have a very big counselling role, far more than we did in the past. We were very much more tertiary oriented straight down the line type of thing. I think the job [now] is much more aware of the students' needs and I think their needs are even greater than what we thought. (C15)*

As compared to the 'individual choice' model suggested by some comments quoted above, this statement implies a socio-analytical sense that the changing clientele of Colleges involves changing social contexts which are the grounds for both changing and intensifying 'needs' as presented by students. Later in this College session, contradictions resurfaced as to how to understand the 'needs/behaviours' of students, and their effects on a 'properly academic' focus. One participant noted that, *with more kids staying on, especially from the lower end of the spectrum in difficulty of the work and all the rest of it* (i.e. kids from social class backgrounds of less powerful cultural capital, thus presumably more difficult to teach), *more fall into the category of missing classes (C22)*. This teacher then categorised such students as *kids who don't know what they are doing ... who have a problem working out what life is all about and probably dealing with a lot of life issues, and we are finding that they [i.e. the school system] are asking more and more now that the classroom teacher do the chasing up (C22)*.

This can be read to express very mixed messages. On the one hand, there is sociological sympathy for kids who "don't know what they're doing" in schools (because schools cater to students with more elite cultural capital; and these "lower end" kids would once have been able to move from schools into work rather than hang around). On the other hand, there is resentment that classroom teachers are now expected to deal with these 'life issue' problems of 'less teachable' kids. Another teacher underscored the workload issue, noting that, at one time, *Student Services would look after that; but it is our job now (C22)*. However, once again a different voice joined in with a more sociologically insightful perspective:

*I have been involved in a program at our school which basically just groups all of these kids into one class. It's called "Work and Society". They had a male and a female teacher in that class for 40% of the time, and it is wonderful because ... [w]hen you have a problem child you have got two people to deal with it. At the end of the class we sit down and discuss what happened, what was effective, and it is really empowering.... [I]t has given me a lot of strength in dealing with these students. I really like them. So it is not just having one or two, we actually have 20 kids, who some teachers have to deal with themselves, which I think is sad. It really has been a load of fun. (C22)*

This teacher's statements imply a sociologically broadened view of 'problems' presented by kids who used to leave school for work but now are retained in Colleges (typically in 'vocational' programs). Rather than view them as offspring of 'dysfunctional families', and hence 'individuals with problems' that are merely to be 'managed', the teacher sees them as intelligently capable young people whose social conditions and issues can be worked with academically. The teacher not only extols a collective rather than individualist pedagogical approach – team teaching that includes professional collaboration to analyse what works in classroom practice – but also a more

meaningfully ‘social’ curricular focus. Thus, kids’ ‘social issues’ need not be seen as separate from, and unfortunately in the way of, their ‘academic’ development. Rather, in the “Work and Society” unit such issues are given intellectually challenging academic treatment that is richly relevant to these students’ life worlds [Lingard et al 2000]. This approach is considerably different from that which streams such students into a curriculum regime primarily about ‘vocational skills for jobs’. I read this teacher also to imply that the pursuit of relevant and intellectually challenging teaching-and-learning would best be approached as a whole-school effort (rather than the ‘sadness’ of individual teachers ‘managing’ one or two ‘problem cases’). Later in the session, this same teacher, observing the changing demographics of College clientele, noted that this *has made us also rethink the methodology that we use and the pedagogy.... [These] are things that we have to constantly question and ask about (C27).*

Discussion of how ‘social issues’ of diverse students enter into curriculum also occurred in the High School session. At the very start of the session, one participant said:

*The biggest stress on teaching workload is certainly the diversification and the balance between the social issues that have to be addressed at schools versus the academic issues and the fact that the school day hasn’t got any longer.... [T]he issue that individual schools are grappling with is what do they throw out of the curriculum.... I know, when I look around at my colleagues in different schools, I see quite different focus in curriculum in various institutions.... [In mine] there is certainly a very heavy emphasis on the social and emotional issues encountered by adolescents, and that forms an enormous chunk of our curriculum. As a result, a parent ... trying to make a comparison of what they went through will generally find that they are not doing the standard Geography and History to the same degree. (HS1)*

The suggestion is that, in the finitude of the school day and calendar, there is no longer room for ‘old standard’ units such as Geography and History if curricular space is to be made for treating “the social and emotional issues encountered by adolescents”. We might question whether Geography and History have faded in order to make room for ‘life issues’. It could be argued that the fading of such ‘older social science’ areas of study, after collapse into the more condensed curriculum space of the SOSE KLA, also corresponds to the advent of economics, voc-ed and IT as ‘new’ curriculum areas preferred by governments. However, that SOSE does become a curricular ‘dumping ground’ for marginalised treatment of the “social and emotional issues” of ‘more marginal’ students is indicated in later statements by the same teacher quoted above:

*SOSE seems to be the one that seems to have to pick up a lot of the social stuff. It’s all the road ready, etc., all those sorts of things. But, I mean, it is one of those faculty areas that people see as expendable. Put it in SOSE. and that is a really important perception because ... in some traditional environments you want to have Ancient History, Geography, everything broken down very prescriptively for parents because that’s what they value. Whereas, if the school says we’re doing things about relationships, like the parenting and childcare curriculum at our school, if you took that to some schools around the ACT and said we are going to introduce parenting and childcare into our Year 10*

*curriculum, I mean the parents would go “What the hell’s that for? What Mickey Mouse course is that?” (HS9).*

Another in that focus group replied: *Well, there’s the social class issues right across town. That wasn’t as obvious ten years ago. Canberra was the place where there weren’t poor people really (HS9).* A school’s social class composite is indeed pivotal to whether “parenting and childcare” curriculum is acceptable to parents or scorned as “Mickey Mouse”. It has been observed that ‘standard’ curricular disciplines, and tight demarcations between them, are maintained in schools that serve families of more powerful ‘cultural capital’; whereas standards and boundaries are more readily loosened in schools with clientele of less powerful ‘cultural capital’ [Bernstein 1975, 1996; Teese 2000]. However, as suggested by the example of the “Work and Society” unit mentioned in the College session, a more truly innovative use of SOSE possibilities would be units richly relevant to the lives of one’s students while at the same offering highly intelligent challenges. It would be difficult to label such units “Mickey Mouse”. It has been observed that, when this combination is offered to ‘less advantaged’ students, they show themselves fully capable of meeting intellectual challenges [Louis et al 1996; Newmann & Associates 1996; Lingard et al 2000]. This is the approach taken by the Queensland “New Basics” [Education Queensland 2000-2001], and advocated by the ACT “High Schools for the New Millennium” project [Brennan 2000]. (Indeed, a ‘Parenting and Childcare’ unit could present relevant intellectual challenge, e.g. study of gender, class, race and other social-cultural correlates of teen pregnancy, single motherhood, etc. However, this is not typically the case in designs that treat such units as training for the marginal labour of girls who are working class, Indigenous, rural, ‘in trouble’, etc.)

A last observation, to close this section, is the difficulty the facilitators had in drawing teachers into discussion about how student and family ‘symptoms’ might be contextualised in class, race and gender relations of power, and how such social-structural relations otherwise play out in schools. In each focus group, questions were asked to prompt discussion of such contextual dynamics of difference and power. However, the gists of the questions were at best taken up ephemerally, quickly shifting into more de-contextualised discourses about student and family ‘behaviour’ issues or ‘special needs’ such as ‘attention deficits’ (with implications of individual psycho- and/or bio-pathological problems). It would be advisable for the Union, perhaps in conjunction with Department sponsorship and resources, to conduct professional development workshops on how student and family ‘behaviours’, ‘needs’ and ‘anxieties’ are linked to (always changing) dynamics of social structural difference and power in the broader society.

## **7. Work Change, Emotional Labour and the Health and Satisfaction of Teachers**

The investigations of teachers’ work in all the previous sections of this report reveal a condition of workload intensification that includes the juggling of a greater range of work activities, increased accountability to multiple constituents, and an eroding capacity to sustain the teaching and learning focus which is supposedly the central motivation of a teaching career. Such complex pressures are of course internalised, and in that sense ‘taken personally’, in the psycho-emotional lives of teachers. It is by no means

accidental to find a growing body of literature that names and analyses an intensifying ‘emotional labour’ dimension in teachers’ work [Hargreaves 1994; Blackmore 1999; Jarzabkowski 2001]. This labour of coping with physical and emotional stress can manifest in debilitations to bodily and psychic health. There can also be squeezes upon time for, and thus quality of, emotionally and materially sustaining family, friendship and other social relations that surround work life. Work relations among colleagues within the school are also affected, as are teachers’ professional identities and sense of job satisfaction. The voices of school staff in the four focus groups gave testimony to all of this.

\* \* \* \* \*

A Primary teacher cited her own illness, along with statistical knowledge about teachers’ health more broadly, to make the case that stresses of work conditions have become worryingly hazardous to teachers’ short- and long-term physical well-being:

*I think [work intensification] has had a big impact on teachers’ health. I would vouch for that. I had breast cancer last year and apparently I am one of many female ACT teachers who had breast cancer. The statistics show that the largest group of women suffering from breast cancer are teachers. The other thing is that the statistics say that if you continue to teach until, I think until 65, your expectations for living beyond that are 18 months. (P21)*

Joining this trend of thought, another Primary teacher sought to underscore that a syndrome of increasing fatigue, and concomitant ill health, is borne not just by ‘older’ teachers, but all teachers. Unprompted by any question or discussion about age difference, this teacher said:

*I don’t think it is dependent on age so much. It’s the tiredness. I work with a lot of young teachers, and in some cases they pick up more viruses but they are also saying “I’m so tired”. Everybody is tired. To get here tonight was really hard. Yes, and to know I have got to go back to a school for a concert. And what is really hard is when you are expected to do something like a camp or an excursion, way beyond your hours. You have things like 24 hours duty of care.... [A]fter being on 3 day camps, Thursday you have to be back in the classroom teaching from 9 to 3, doing your normal workload after ... getting about 3 to 4 hours sleep ... These sorts of things create a huge amount of anxiety, a huge amount of stress and fatigue. (P22)*

In the High School group it was also noted that rising fatigue, and associated problems with health as well as family relations, are embodied by young as well as older teachers. A teacher said that s/he had prepared for the focus group by distributing

*a little questionnaire out to everybody [i.e. school colleagues] before I came along today.... Every single one of these – and I had about 16 responses ... about personal life and so on – said less social life and problems with family and their own health. Some ... were saying things like, it used to be only the 50 year olds that are tired, and now the 20 year olds are as well.... It is like, everybody’s tired ... we older ones are thinking it is because we are getting older, but the young ones are saying “I am so tired”. (HS13)*

Indeed, as presented earlier in this report, High School group participants expressed concerns for young staff who, in starting out on contract, are likely to feel that, to earn

permanency, they need to give strong impressions of their work ethic. In an era when schools are forced to ‘do more with less’, they thus ‘volunteer’ to take unhealthy excesses of responsibility. In the flow of this same dialogue, a High School Deputy noted that successive waves of policy ‘reform’, insufficiently resourced, exhaust teachers generally; but this was especially worrying for young careers:

*I have a concern ... because they [early-career teachers] are going to burn out ... [W]e are going to have this cyclic pattern, if you like, where there is a form of burnout and you are going to require an artillery to come in and prop that lot up and then you are going to get the next wave. That’s what happened in Britain I think three or four years ago. They had this wave of reform coming in ... and a friend of mine said, “We’re just struggling after four years and then we get this next wave of reform”. I am really concerned about what the Department is doing because I think we are all getting quite fatigued and we have to be very careful with your young teachers. (HS4)*

The word “burnout” was also invoked in the Preschool group, where a teacher discussed how intensified accumulations of bodily and psychic stress are affecting the sense of long-run career satisfaction: *I keep saying to myself, “Can I do this for another 10 years?” I am very concerned about where I will go next. I feel like I am burning out a little. I feel that my reluctance to take on anything more [when student loads increase] shows that I am shackled (PS20).* Another member of that group, perhaps concerned to avoid the impression that teachers are not prepared to meet student needs, responded: *I don’t feel like I am burnt out yet. I have had a particularly challenging year; but, by the same token, I feel really satisfied that I can see the progress that those children have made.* We might read this to signify that, yes, work is intensifying, but thus far it has not outweighed the compensatory satisfaction of helping children. However, in replying to a facilitator’s question about the effects of workload on family life, this same teacher implied the significant toll in such ‘compensation’: *Well, my daughter refuses to be a teacher. When asking her what would you like to do, her first answer is definitely not teaching.* When the facilitator prompted – *Why do you think she says this?* – the teacher replied: *I don’t know, probably the long hours that you work, the shuffling you have to do ... and if you bring things home it is an either/or sometimes (PS21).* This provoked another to observe how work intensification is squeezing out time for nurture of/from family and friends:

*I think you need to work very hard at having good friends ... It is not something that comes naturally anymore. It is something that you have to work at as well, to have your social life and your friendship. You have to work hard to keep in touch because we are all so busy.... [I]t is something that is almost like work in itself; but for me it is a part of my sanity. (PS21)*

The above dialogue suggests a psychic tension within teachers’ professional identities, between, on the one hand, sustaining belief in the satisfaction of teaching and learning work with students; yet, on the other hand, having to acknowledge that work intensification is increasingly depriving one of time for important relationships and other satisfactions in the whole of one’s life. Thus, a Primary teacher testified:

*I think it is one of those catch 22 jobs. You could have this fantastic day where you feel like you have achieved so much ... [and] that reflects [on] your out of school hours because you feel more positive; but ... that can also affect you as far as your stress levels go and your personal relationships. (P21)*

To this, another Primary teacher responded:

*I don't think there is any question ... that stress levels add to tension within families as well and many teachers talk about that. I know we have to have a balanced life, and I keep trying to balance mine, and I know I need to get out and go to the gym and things like that; but I tell you what: to find the time and energy to do that [is hard]. I think the hardest thing I am finding is, well, when is enough enough. Should I be working until 10 pm every night and then at school again next morning? (P22)*

This query – with its implication of delicate issues of triage between job demands and the rest of life – was followed by a flurry of tales about working on weekends and late at night while struggling to keep up relations with kids and partners. Among these testimonies, one participant said: *I can go into school for a day on the weekend ... and there will be 6 people there on Sunday. Some of them will say, "I've dropped my kids off to tennis and I've got two hours to get all this done, don't hold me up and talk" (P22).* Another said: *I know some teachers with families don't sit down to get their work done until about 11 pm at night because they've done all they need to do with their kids and they don't want to let that slip so then they are up to 1 am in the morning (P23).*

In trying not to let family and friendship relations slip and suffer, while also not giving short shrift to students and other work responsibilities, the tension between the two induces teachers to endure more stress than is healthy or, at its may turn out, 'manageable'. To this must be added the pressures of responsibility that many teachers feel to their colleagues. A College group member, commenting on the links between overwork, stress and illness, observed that colleagues are more frequently ill than in the past; however: *People tend [now] to work when they are sick because they do have this feeling that you can't ... let your class get behind (C24).* Perhaps this means that teachers now perceive the range of activities they must keep on top of as too complex to leave to replacement teachers. It might also mean that, in a period of resource deprivation, replacement teachers are less available when needed. This was implied in a response to the above-quoted comment by another member of the College group: *We have exactly that problem [in our College] because we know if we don't turn up this other teacher in the staffroom has got to cover your classes. So you feel really guilty, so you turn up when you're half dead (C24).*

Thus, at the same time that work is now more exhausting and so more of an illness co-factor, teachers also are more prone to working when sick rather than taking needed – and contractually entitled – time off to recuperate. The above-quoted statement from a College teacher indicates that this is prodded not simply by lack of human resources, but sustained by an emotional factor of "guilt". That is, in needing to care for oneself, yet not wanting one's colleagues to suffer, some teachers 'resolve' this indecent contradiction by a complex psychic emergence of 'guilt feelings' which tip the tense balance toward responsibility for colleagues' health at the expense of one's own. In the High School

group, the term ‘guilt’ also was used to signify an emotive force driving teachers to over-work. Said a participant:

*[Y]ou have the students coming around saying we need 20 staff to go to our dance party tonight, and then if the teachers don't go they feel really guilty because that means the kids don't get their dance party. There's a lot of things happening in schools, particularly ... in the extra-curricular area, that [are] making teachers feel very guilty if they don't say yes ... [I]t seems to be something that teachers will have to do because, in the outside world, the kids aren't getting those opportunities, and some families are depending on them ... So teachers feel they have to give those opportunities to those kids ... Then there's another aspect of that: if you don't do it, well, maybe you won't get that promotion, maybe you won't get that contract written up very glowingly ... and so there are Departmental issues you see coming in here as well. There are ethical issues. (HS9)*

This statement further illustrates how guilt feelings can arise in relation to multiple constituencies – colleagues, students and parents – and with regard to various domains of work activity. In the Primary group, the term ‘guilt’ came up at a few different junctures in the discussion, and took on some profound significances. In the first instance in which the term arose, a teacher talked about pressures s/he felt to get on top of new ICT uses:

*I think it causes an awful lot of guilt amongst teachers. We had an in-service recently and we were shown a magnificent program, but, realistically, it is impossible to implement ... It causes you to think: “Oh gosh, I don't know enough about it”, or “I feel guilty because I don't know enough. (P4)*

Later in the Primary group dialogue, a teacher presented the following perception of how Principals respond to pressures of the many constituencies to which they feel accountable:

*[T]hey want their school to look good and to do the best for the kids they have got ... and they sort of take on everything. I am sure Principals ... feel that guilt factor as well if they don't take it on. They are under pressure from the parent community as well. (P10).*

Of course, Principals have always been pressed by responsibilities to multiple constituencies. However, the above statement can be read to imply more than this; i.e. that pressures from a converging multiplicity of sources have, of late, intensified to the point of psychic implosion. Principals now feel ‘guilt-ridden’ to a point of critical excess; and, moreover, they model this guilt to other staff, such that it transfers down the chain of school relations. We can thus understand testimonies about a “guilt factor” to signify a powerful emotive force in social relations among staff: a syndrome of work and governance relations structured by guilt, both top-down and lateral, which staff internalise as a self-regulatory goad to work in excess of what is healthy or fair to anyone. It may start from a virtuous willingness to work overly hard to meet needs of students, families and other stakeholders, and/or to relieve colleagues from unjust burdens. However, if this in turn prods colleagues to do likewise, in a mutually reinforcing syndrome, then nobody wins.

Indeed, Principals might need in-service so that they can act as agents in changing this syndrome of ‘guilt’-driven escalation of the excess work both they and staff take on. Those at ‘leadership’ levels of school governance need to appreciate that good leadership

of, and ‘duty of care’ to, staff requires their own resistance to acting as models of an unhealthy sense of ‘responsibility’ for indecent over-work. Rather, they should inspire collective recognition of the need to take over-work in hand; and this might need to include courageous messages to the Department that its ‘duty of care means resourcing what it asks schools to accomplish, not devolving ‘responsibility’ onto staff to accomplish the impossible.

The irresponsible consequences of ‘guilt’-driven over-work, uncurbed by good leadership, were expressed by a Primary teacher who testified that, in the past year, s/he had only reluctantly yielded to the physical necessity of taking *a lot of time off with sickness and stress*. S/he amplified how a factor leading to this degree of debilitation had been the lack of time to recuperate adequately from peak periods of work exertion.

Rather, work had

*impinged quite heavily on my holidays because it would take me two weeks just to start breathing again. That’s time that is considered stand down time where you are supposed to be actually preparing for the next term, and it was very hard to be even motivated to think about school because you are so worn out, so exhausted, and you are trying to catch up with friends. It got to the point where I stopped doing it [i.e. catch up with friends]. I used to make an effort, but it became too much. Suddenly your social life was squeezed into the holidays. Basically, my private life does not exist because of the pressures within work, and it actually gets me quite upset about the time and devotion I have put in, and all you are doing is being harassed, harassed, harassed. You have to be producing this and producing that and the other, and there is not the support and not the “Congratulations, you’ve done an effective job as a teacher”. The only positive feedback you get is from the children. It’s not from the Department and it’s not from some Principals. (P25).*

To this, another Primary teacher added wryly:

*Then you are sent to ... an independent Counsellor who has no understanding of the job you are doing, and they are giving you advice like, “Decrease your workload. Go out and do sport. Learn to de-stress and do meditation”. Time? Where do you get the time to do those sorts of things?*

This teacher then explained that, due to overwork and stress, s/he was *now on three days per week ... taken out for health reasons*. The teacher who had spoken previously then said: *There is no program to build you back into the system ... and I think that’s probably a really good path to consider when you [the facilitators] go back and talk to the Union; that they do something in regards to that situation*. A facilitator then asked: *How many are coming out on stress leave?* (P25) The teacher replied:

*An enormous number, I am told. There is one teacher on our staff who took time out to give me some issues for today. She finished up with “workplace stresses lead to burn out and loss of personal confidence”, and I know in her situation she thinks it is a demoralising conclusion to what she saw as a satisfying, challenging and rewarding career. To end up feeling that her career is over in this way, this loss of personal confidence, [is] a demoralising conclusion. (P25)*

This exchange indicates how teachers can be overworked to a point not just of threat to physical and psychic health, but to ultimate demoralisation of their sense of

professional identity and calling. It also indicates how insult is added to injury in the failure to receive – from Principals or the Department – at least some honest recognition of their sacrifices (let alone efforts to buffer and protect them from indecent degrees of overwork and stress). Instead, as part-and-parcel of the trend toward ‘crisis-driven’ public institutional governance [Taylor et al 1997; Marginson & Considine 2000], staff over-exertions and accompanying distress are denied recognition until crisis points are reached. The above testimony indicates that, when symptoms do become too dire to ignore, they may then be greeted by fatuous ‘therapeutic solutions’ which put a cheery face on the typically devolutionary message that teachers themselves – and all by themselves – are somehow responsible for ‘managing’ their time and energy such that they do not reach the point of work and life crisis.

Given the substantial pressures on school leaders, it is understandable that they develop denial mechanisms for ignoring ‘pre-critical’ signs of staff distress. And, given how conservative modernist ideology works to define Executive ‘duty of care’ as primarily vertical – i.e. responsibility is due upwards to central government, more so than horizontally to staff, students and families – it is also understandable that Principals develop mechanisms for fending off a sense that they must seriously care for their staff by buffering excess demands which induce over-work and stress. While mechanisms for avoiding recognition of such responsibility are understandable, they are not, in the final analysis, acceptable. What, then, could make it otherwise? This raises questions about the relation between systems of governance and teacher agency. We must consider how the Department relates to teaching staff and especially Principals. We need to look at governance relations within schools, across levels of Principal, Executive and staff who mainly teach. Not least, we must inquire whether constructive change might arise, ground-up, from teachers who mobilise a proactive sense of professional identity around commitment to good teaching and learning.

## **8. Governance Relations and Teachers’ Professional Agency**

This report indicates serious ideological and material erosion of conditions for the ethically fair and pragmatically sensible aims (1) to keep workloads of school staff at decent levels; so as (2) to enable staff to fulfil their core work of good teaching and learning. Given all the factors now working against these aims, to recover lost ground, and move forward in new ways, will require concerted effort across all levels and interfaces of school governance relations. There will need to be processes for better communication and cooperation between Department, school Executives, and less senior staff who primarily teach. Before making recommendations towards such concerted efforts, we need to consider testimony from focus groups about the present state of governance relations, and how this affects teaching conditions and prospects. The testimonies presented in this section present a largely pessimistic picture. However, we must draw lessons about how the professional agency of all concerned can be mobilised toward a constructive vision of educational labour that works toward a more wholesome and optimistic future for students, communities and teachers. (Some of the passages quoted

below have also been presented in other sections of this report. However, they are here re-presented in a different thematic context.)

\* \* \* \* \*

In all four focus groups, the facilitators asked whether workloads are in any way negotiated among staff and Executive leadership. Promptly and unanimously, the answer was always a flat no: workloads are either ordained by Principals or – as discussed in previous sections – are ‘voluntarily’ taken on by staff in response to pressures that hardly make for a real choice. As discussed above, one of those pressures is a “guilt factor”. Although already quoted in the previous section, it is worth putting the Primary group’s discussion of this “guilt factor” in a fuller dialogic context. A facilitator asked: *If nobody likes [excessive workloads, then] ... [d]o you feel like you have [the] capacity to make a change?* A teacher responded:

*In order to make a change people need to see that you really need that change. A lot of us always say, we don’t like it, but we end up doing it, and maybe that is a teacher thing to do. You know, that everyone just ends up doing it, and I think in order for something to change, you really have to push that change and give good reasons behind what it is.*  
(P10)

This notion of “a teacher thing to do” suggests that teachers are socialised with habits of ‘just doing it’. The suggestion is also that such habits, and their institutional reinforcements, run deep; thus, it will take leadership which can articulate a rationale for constructive change, and can support this change by instituting and reinforcing new practices which develop better habits, including resistance to overwork, within a regime where teachers can do good work in healthy ways. Another teacher then replied to the above-quoted statement:

*[S]ometimes that [change] doesn’t happen because of the dictatorial nature of Principals. They are not all like that. They are also under pressure ... [due to which they] take on things and they feel that guilt factor as well if they don’t take it on.* (P10)

In the context of this flow of dialogue, the comment about a “guilt factor” felt by Principals suggests that, if anyone, Principals are the school governance agents in positions of enough power to lead in breaking the syndrome of chronic acceptance of over-work. However, the “guilt factor” operating within/on the Principle position makes it difficult for them to first break their own habits which model acceptance of all the work chronically expected of them and the school. Moreover, to get all this work done, even the most decent and ‘democratic’ (rather than “dictatorial”) Principals will delegate and devolve much responsibility ‘down the line’ to other staff. Picking up on these implications, a facilitator suggested that such tendencies, while understandable, are not acceptable since Principals have ‘duty of care’ not only to government and other clients, but also to their teaching staff, and to good teaching and learning for students. Said the facilitator: *[T]he ideal is that the Principal would buffer you to do the teaching and learning work ... Is there any change over time in the Principals’ ability to do that? ... Are they becoming more devolvers of the pressures on them to you?* (P10-11). A teacher answered: *Yes, they are.* Another group member then presented an Executive perspective on ethical responsibility:

*I think some Principals will be more perceptive of people's workloads than others; and I think it is not just the Principal's job, but the Executive. In my role, it is part of my responsibility to check the workloads of people.... For example, we have a first year out teacher who has organised the Year 3 camp and done a wonderful job with IT. It hasn't been put on him; it is a role he has chosen. He is not leading the IT, but just a small group of teachers, and things like that; but it is an enormous load. Tomorrow there is some spare time so I've given him one and a half hours, and said 'This won't cover what you've put in, but it might help relieve it'. I think the Executive have to be very perceptive, act as a buffer, and acknowledge the extra work of people. (P11)*

This Deputy affirms the ideal that a responsible Executive will act to buffer teaching staff from excessive workload. However, the equivocations and rationalisations in the given illustration (e.g. suggesting that this first year teacher 'chose' excess responsibility without inducement) indicate awareness that, even when Executives are of a "more perceptive" sort, provisions of 'relief' that they are able to bestow do not match the excess work "put in" by staff. The perception of most participants across focus groups is that Principals and Deputies do wish to buffer teaching staff against indecent workload intensification, but generally cannot see themselves able to, given all the pressures on them. These include not only the need to 'manage' with limited resources, but also increasing cooptation of school Executives to a 'corporatist' understanding of the institutions wherein they preside. As a College teacher's statements express, the latter involves strong socialisation of Executive staff into certain 'managerial' understandings of their governance roles and responsibilities:

*[I]t comes back to what are the Executive doing? The Executive are being managers in a business and ... they are snowed under by the same sort of processes [such] that they don't really have time. It is that top-down thing. Everybody is sort of looking up, saying come on, what is going to come down next? So the Executive don't have a lot of time to come and help Level 1s because they are working with what are their imperatives, and a lot of it is pretty peripheral to actual education. (C12).*

In other words, tensions pulling on the Executive level, and especially Principals, induce them to act and think too much as institutional managers, thus forsaking roles as educational leaders. Another way to put this is that there is tension between a sense of 'duty of care' to governing agents and forces that steer from 'above', as against a duty to care for those 'on the ground': i.e. students and communities whom schools have foundational responsibility to serve. Extending this prime ethical responsibility, Executives must take care to buffer workload excesses and distractions that inhibit teachers' focus on "actual education" primarily. However, testimonies of group participants suggest that Principals and Deputies increasingly succumb to ideological and material pressures to compromise optimal teaching-and-learning conditions for the sake of 'managing' the institution's survival. Some staff personalise this lack of educational leadership as deficits in their Executive leaders, rather than as effects of the pressures of structural positions. Said one College teacher:

*I think ... the Principal and the Deputies and the Level 2s need to have more training in developing personal relations and improving the quality of feelings in the school ... I'd*

*really like to see that – I think especially having gone through a period of quite a lot of change to do with computers, change of Principals, Deputy Principals, Level 2s moving around a lot.... It isn't always considered what the impact is on staff ... A bit of training or extra help, input into developing that feeling of camaraderie around the school, I think could be really beneficial. But I don't know what other people think. (C29)*

Perhaps this invitation for others to respond expressed a worried reluctance to be alone in talking 'out of school' about deficits among Executive staff. It did draw another voice:

*The feeling [is] that the management skills are valued more importantly at both Level 2 and other levels than the person's people skills. I think really when it comes to the crunch you feel that your Level 2 or Deputy or whatever, that you sort of count on them to have good people skills, and feel disappointed if they don't.... You're lucky if anyone that is your superior ... has got those sorts of skills. I am sure some areas work really well, but there [are] some examples that are pretty bad too. (C29-30).*

Although these statements overtly express 'disappointment' in personal qualities of Executive staff, comments about a need for 'more training' might imply underlying recognition that difficulties in 'relating' do not inhere as much in the people who occupy senior levels of school governance as in the conditions attaching to their positions within a relational structure of governance. As seen in other passages quoted above, teaching staff generally sympathise about pressures on Principals and Deputies to pass loads 'down the line' while perhaps avoiding ample acknowledgement of burdens thus put on staff.

In recognising burdens on people in Executive positions within the school, whom teachers see and know, they are likely to target 'the Department' as a remote 'power above' that drops unreasonably pressures onto all levels of school staff. This may not be a sufficiently complex vision of systemic conditions at levels of governance beyond the school setting. However, without better consultation between Department and school staff, most cannot be expected to recognise that, like those in Executive positions within schools, those who work in the Department are also under ideological and material pressures that constrain and induce their agendas for schools – about which many Department agents also have ambivalent feelings. It is psychologically understandable that staff will seek a nameable 'higher up' location on which to project wrong-headed exertions of pressures they experience 'coming down' on them. Moreover, many such expressions of resentment indicate legitimate frustration at Departmental lack of consultation which denies avenues for staff to contribute their professional expertise and agency in policy design and implementation. Earlier in this report, a High School teacher was quoted, expressing frustration about the Department's refusal to consider alternative ways to report on ICT competencies. It bears repeating here:

*[T]here is no listening. It really is directive, a policy directive and you can't move within that. There's an inflexibility that I think staff are really starting to buck at ... If the Department listened to what teachers are actually saying, they are actually supporting what the Department wants but they don't like the way there is a lack of consultation, and [refusal to hear teachers say how] there are other ways that we could do it. (HS12)*

Another passage cited earlier, from the College focus group, also bears repeating, this time in a fuller dialogical context. In discussion about ‘reform fatigue’, a College teacher observed that school practices must of course change with the times. The complaint, again, was that ‘management’ is non-communicative, inflexible, and thus ignorant of teachers’ professional knowledge about what sorts of changes can work:

*There has to be changes, society is changing, business is changing, life is changing. Education must change and probably continuously; but the [proper] idea of ‘management’ is that the manager is supposed to look at the people who are doing the actual work and [ask] how can we help you do your job better. But that approach isn’t coming from our management ... [which says] ‘That is what you will do’. They should say, look, this new thinking has come up, what do you think about it? Here are some papers you can think about it? (C26)*

As quoted earlier, another voice then sought to affirm teachers’ openness to reform that has good reason: *But I don’t think that one should draw the conclusion that teachers are always resistant to change.... If people see things as worthwhile they will do it.* This teacher thus sought to correct any impression that, although teachers may be ‘reform fatigued’, they are anti-reform in a knee-jerk way. A third voice then sought to emphasise the necessity of a consultative process that includes the professional expertise of teachers in warranting, designing and implementing reform: *When we have been doubting or question things, we have been seen as very negative people, when in fact we are trying to say that we’ve been here, we’ve actually been doing sorts of things along this [line] and we doubt this is very effective.... I think that is a frustration (C26)*

In another moment of College group dialogue, a teacher complained that funding is not applied to *the purposes we want it to be used for*, because *we have to do these things that the Department says and they don’t want to listen to us. So that kind of thing can have an effect on us (C17)*. This teacher’s mood of complaint then moved in a pro-actively constructive direction, suggesting that staff might take collegial care of each other so as to reinforce and protect a professional focus on teaching-and-learning:

*I think teachers getting together more to socialise and just talk about things in general is an important part of school; but we don’t really have enough time for it ... It is a fairly high pressure job ... and I think teachers need more care and they need to take more care of each other so that we can better care for the students. (C17)*

This teacher raises consciousness to the vital link between (1) teachers’ capacities to care for student learning, and (2) collegial care among staff. S/he indicates that horizontal responsibility to colleagues, professionally cognisant of their prime duty to care for student learning, deserves privilege over a vertical sense of responsibility to a line-management hierarchy that, without much consultation, devolves onto school staff far too much of what should be government’s responsibility for material and ethical care of both students and staff. Teachers know that needed time and opportunity for professional collaboration – focussed on ‘actual education’ – is squeezed dry by a governmentality of ‘school-based management’. Against this, teachers retain their sense that such time and opportunity is vital to fulfil their ethical responsibility and professional identity in

promoting good teaching and learning. The above-quoted College group dialogue continued as follows:

*If we had a Moderation Day without Moderation, it would actually be terrific. Again, there is a lack of faith in us. They think that, if we had a ... [day of this sort], that we would be off topic; but they've never been to a dinner party where there are more than two teachers there.... When teachers get together ... we talk about what it is, what works. If somebody just said, 'You have a day to share what you are doing, ... talk about your good stuff, talk about your great bits of assessment item, talk about the things that work, just have a chat, we would probably still be there at 4 pm in the afternoon. (C17)*

Another voice joined in:

*I was just thinking back to the time before where we had work bans on. It was very interesting when we had that, because there seemed to be at our place that every lunch time had a meeting for this committee or something or other, and they brought in that you had to have a half hour for lunch. I really think that empowered people because it gave them something that belonged to them, and we didn't force that one. (C17)*

These are not nostalgic statements about a bygone golden age of perfect collegiality. Rather, they articulate valid professional recognition that, in the too rare circumstances when teachers have time for substantive conversation about their work, constructive communion occurs. And they articulate valid professional aspiration for such communion. A Primary teacher expressed the frustration felt by teachers when this aspiration is denied: *When you do school development, one of the things is communication ... Most schools are down in the area of communication, and yet, you sort of think, "Good heavens: what else do we have to do?" (P11). A facilitator then asked the group in general: Have [you] got ideas about how ... to do it? One participant suggested that the Department should actually take on a curriculum body that moves around schools and supports schools developing their curriculum: a professional ... [body that] can come around, listen to the needs of the school. (P11-12). The facilitator took up this use of the term 'professional' to press the issue of whether communication among teachers might go beyond scattered moments of opportunity, converging in forums where teachers' expertise and agency can pool, with proactive effects. The facilitator asked: [H]ave any of you experienced the ability to talk to your colleagues? We are asking here about professional communities, whether you can, within your context, build the politicisation that is needed? A reply came quickly: No, we don't have time. Honestly, we are buried. Basically, that is what it comes down to.... It is hard to get teachers together for a Union meeting (P12).*

In other words, teachers deeply feel how workload intensification has eroded their capacities both to generate informal venues, and to attend formal venues, for professional communication of needed sorts. Said a Preschool teacher: *[W]hat is coming out is that everyone is so exhausted by the end of the day that they are letting their networks drop. So they are not able to keep up those networks and we desperately need [them] (PS24). More such testimony could be cited; but the point has been made that teachers see professional communion among peers as crucial for sustaining a focus on their core work of "actual education". Many discourses of 'professionalism' circulate in educational policy climates*

these days, some of them ideologically slanted towards a ‘corporate-managerial’ cooptation of teachers’ roles and responsibilities. However, the concept of ‘professional’ that moves teachers – as vital to their sense of career identity – signifies capacity to thrive in teaching that enables students to thrive in learning.

To sum up: Teachers feel need for professional communion despite all the conditions and factors working against it. Principals and Deputies wish to buffer and protect professional community despite pressures of their positions that make this so difficult. What, then, can be done to further these commendable needs and wishes? What can be done to move beyond pessimism of a realistic appraisal of constraints imposed by the ‘conservative modernism’ agendas that still prevail in educational policy? What can give optimistic momentum to the will of school staff, working with communities they serve, to move forward in addressing real and changing educational needs of diverse students and their families?

Clearly, those in all school, government and stakeholder locations who truly care about good educational service to the diversity of Australia’s students and communities must pool and mobilise their professional knowledge and agency to shift the prevailing policy climate. Of course, this is a tall order, requiring “pragmatic radicalism” [Boomer 1999] and systematic cooperation across all levels of the work and governance structure of schooling, both within schools and, ultimately, across schools and sectors [Connell 1993]. However, as discussed in the introduction to this report, the coalitional momentum for such a policy shift has already begun to some degree in most states and territories. It is still at an early stage, but significant, in the ACT, where the Department has adopted recommendations from the *High Schools for the New Millennium* report [Brennan 2000], including implementation of a year 9 Exhibitions project that has already had significant success. Other initiatives, such as learning journeys and portfolios, have been introduced in other sectors. Moreover, the ACT government has begun allocating more resources to these progressive curriculum, pedagogy and assessment reforms, including more focus on particular needs of ‘disadvantaged groups’, as well as on educational needs of all students.

As can be seen in the testimonies of teachers in this report, such movements have not greatly registered with ACT teachers as yet. Nor should we get carried away with optimism about them. It remains to be seen if there will be sufficient Department resourcing and follow-through to sustain incipient progressive developments. It remains to be seen if new program possibilities will be initiated widely enough to amount to a sufficiently systemic ‘reform’, capable of countering still dominant conservative modernist legacies by displacing rather than adding on to them. It remains to be seen whether teachers will be given sufficient professional development, and otherwise gain sufficient time for professional community, as necessary to meet, greet and take new possibilities seriously.

Indeed, the strongest note of focus group optimism about new spaces for teacher professional community was a guarded one, voiced by a Deputy in the High School group:

*Something has to go, and you actually have to look at what you're doing in the school; and if you want to get back what's important, you have to look at what's happening in the classroom. I think that is where a lot of level 1s, in the last two years at least, with the Exhibitions [projects, facilitated by] the [Australian] National Schools Network Research Circles, have actually started to work more in their classrooms with reflective practice, working with their colleagues. There is more collaboration in the last two years, particularly as a result of the [A]NSN, and professional pathways is going to pick up on that as well with the reflective practice idea where you sit down with a mentor and you talk about your work. (HS4)*

This Deputy's reasoned optimism about new professional possibilities – both curricular and communicative – is checked by the caveat that “something has to go”. Indeed, it was only moments later in this High School group dialogue that the same Deputy, as cited in the previous section, expressed grave worry about the trend toward wave upon wave of reforms which raise *concern about what the Department is doing because I think we are all getting quite fatigued and we have to be very careful with our young teachers that they don't get fatigued as well* (HS4).

Viable teacher professional community requires time, venues and workload relief necessary to sustain development among school staff. For a school's Executive leadership to nurture, and be part of, such communion requires adequate Departmental provision of resources to work with. To continue devolving so much un-resourced responsibility down the line to the school site – playing into habits of a ‘just do it’ cultural ethos – will not enable time for needed developments. Nor will recitation of mantras such as ‘work smarter’, which too often are invoked without viable suggestions of what this might mean in practice: what really could be dropped, what honestly could be done more efficiently without compromising quality of teaching and learning. The verdict of this report is that, while real ‘work smarter’ possibilities are worth considering, they are not likely to be significant enough to make much of a dent in overblown workloads. Without forthright acknowledgement that the problem is fundamentally one of inadequate resource provision, relative to demands on teachers' work time and space, ‘work smarter’ becomes a rhetorical move in the power game of devolution that, in effect, blames teachers for their excessive workloads. It leaves school staff at all levels to make terrible ‘choices’ about what they will triage in struggling to balance quality educational service, health, and other life relationships.

There is no getting around the need for school staff, Union, Department and stakeholder communities to enter into a serious consultative relationship around the best work for teachers, and the necessary conditions and provisions to assure this work. The Union should seize the initiative in brokering this relationship by setting certain agendas for dialogue. To these end, the AEU should enter in negotiations about teachers' workload, work conditions, and work/governance processes according to the following recommendations.

## **9. Recommendations**

1. That the ACT Branch of the AEU accept this report and workshop its findings and recommendations for further action.
2. That the ACT Branch of the AEU, hopefully in collaboration with the Department (towards which end the Union should enter into negotiations), sponsor and promote a range of modes, venues and targeted groups for professional development and other initiatives among ACT teachers and other vital stakeholders. These include:
  - (a) For beginning teachers: Build into induction processes the examination of teachers' work and strategies for developing professional support and community, in order to alert new teachers, and teachers new to the system, to strategies and pitfalls relevant to their positions. This should include raising consciousness to the dangers of taking on too much work, and the need for participation in professional learning communities which act to protect new teachers against over subscription and over diversification of work responsibilities at early career stages. The strongest protection provided by such professional communities would be to develop, and to keep all staff reminded about, the warrants for why teaching and learning is the core both of professional identity and educational service to students, communities and society.
  - (b) For level 1 and 2 teachers: Examine ways to build professional learning communities in schools and across schools, with particular emphasis on support for innovation in teaching and learning.
  - (c) For Principals and Executive teachers: Examine ways to buffer teachers from administrative and accountability requirements that detract from the development and sustaining of excellent teaching and collegial activity. Principals and Executive staff should be encouraged to lead in the promotion of professional community with a teaching and learning focus. This will require that they contemplate constructive ways to resist being models themselves of the chronic acceptance of overwork. That is, they need to lead in breaking the cycle of acquiescence to internalised guilt feelings that drive workload escalation.
  - (d) For clusters of teachers and/or other interest groups: Provide opportunities, whenever new initiatives are announced, for teachers to discuss the wisdom of desirable innovations first among themselves, and further with families, communities and, hopefully, the Department. The dialogic context of such communication across interested stakeholders must be open to hearing as well as presenting views, in order to reach an informed consensus that transcends the partiality of interested standpoints. In these dialogues, teachers should be

in a position to explain how workloads might be increased through otherwise desirable initiatives; and constructive discussion should follow about what sorts of resourcing would prevent workload intensification in the implementation of desired innovations.

- (e) For all interested school staff: Workshops on emotional labour and recognising its dimensions in the workplace.
  - (f) For all school staff: Workshops on understanding the complexities of changing social-structural conditions – economic, political and cultural – that contextualise the educational and social needs of diverse families and communities, with attention to both the teaching-and-learning and pastoral care work of teachers.
  - (g) For Union representatives, AEU Industrial Officers and interested members: Seminar on identifying the signs of excessive workload and escalating demands in the workplace, including ways to undermine guilt reactions and initiate potential areas for action.
  - (h) Provide a list of possible topics for fellowship research to contribute to the priority areas discussed by teachers through the AEU, perhaps in collaboration with the ANSN and the University of Canberra.
  - (i) In the various efforts to develop professional community among school staff, priority should be given to research circle and learning circle approaches, such as those that have been facilitated in the ACT by the ANSN for the Year 9 Exhibitions Project and other professional development initiatives.
3. That the ACT Branch of the AEU, in Enterprise Bargaining negotiations with the Department, include the following:
- (a) Take a strong ‘zero tolerance’ stance with regard to any further workload intensification, i.e. all reforms and other new initiatives that the Department expects school staff to implement must first be vetted as to what resources are necessary – and the resources must then be assured – to avoid intensification of workloads. The vetting process should include representatives from all levels of school staff, as well as Union representation.
  - (b) Develop criteria for defining ‘reasonable’ workloads, i.e. that sustain health, job satisfaction, and time for wholesome life away from work - and implement timetables for gradual reduction of workloads to reasonable levels for staff whose workloads are ‘excessive’ according to the benchmarks for ‘reasonability’.

- (c) Attenuate the top down and negative devolutionary effects of ‘school based management’ trends by developing transparent, consultative and participatory processes for making decisions which affect the work conditions and workloads of school staff. These processes should include Departmental officers, representatives of school staff across work and governance levels, Union representatives, and, when relevant, other interested stakeholders.

### **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to thank the ACT Branch of the Australian Education Union for this commissioned research and for infrastructural support and conversational guidance along the way, especially through the efforts of Clive Hagggar and Fiona MacGregor. In its link with this study, the Australian National Schools Network, of which I am a member, continues to show its commitment to taking seriously the voices of teachers in analysing their own conditions and creating their own opportunities for making a difference in their lives and that of students, families and communities. This project is dedicated to these joint AEU and ANSN purposes. My thanks also to Viv White, who shared in the conception and facilitation of the focus groups and showed faith in my capacities to work with teachers for the good of the profession and the students and communities they serve. Marie Brennan was, as always, a helpful and constructive contributor in numerous ways. I trust that the teachers who volunteered to participate in this project will find their descriptions and insights faithfully rendered. Their participation demonstrated professional commitment to colleagues and the school sectors and communities in which they serve.

### **References**

- Apple, M.W. (2001)** *Educating the “Right” Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality*, New York & London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Ball, S. (2000)** “Performativities and Fabrications in the Education Economy: Towards the Performative Society?”, *AER*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp 1-23.
- Bernstein, B. (1975)** *Class, Codes and Control, Volume 3: Towards a Theory of Educational Transmissions*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Bernstein, B. (1996)** *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control, and Identity*, Bristol, Pennsylvania: Taylor & Francis.
- Blackmore, J. (1999)** *Troubling Women: Feminism, Leadership, and Educational Change*, Buckingham & Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Boomer, G. (1999)** “Pragmatic Radical Teaching and the Disadvantaged Schools Program”, in B. Green (ed.), *Designs on Learning: Essays on Curriculum and Teaching by Garth Boomer*, Canberra: Australian Curriculum Studies Association.
- Brennan, M. (2000)** *A new generation of high schools for the ACT*, Australian Capital Territory: ACT Department of Education and Community Services.

- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J.C. (1977)** *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, trans. R. Nice, London: Sage.
- Campbell, I. (2001)** *Cross-National Comparisons: Work time around the world*, Melbourne: ACTU.
- Centre for Studies in Literacy, Policy and Learning Cultures (2002)** *A Report of the Essential Learnings Seminar*, South Australia: Department of Education, Training and Employment.
- Connell, R.W. (1993)** *Schools and Social Justice*, Leichardt, New South Wales: Pluto Press.
- Department of Education and Community Services, ACT (2002)** “Year 9 Exhibitions 2001”, [http://activated.decs.act.gov.au/actdrd/EXHIBIT\\_2001/](http://activated.decs.act.gov.au/actdrd/EXHIBIT_2001/)
- Delpit, L. (1993)** “The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People’s Children”, in L. Weiss & M. Fine (eds), *Beyond Silenced Voices: Class, race and gender in United States Schools*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Dwyer, P. & Wyn, J. (2001)** *Youth, Education and Risk: Facing the Future*, London: Routledge.
- Education Queensland (2001-2002)** “The New Basics Project”, <http://education.qld.gov.au/corporate/newbasics/>
- Fraser, N. (1997)** *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.
- Fraser, N. (1997)** *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition*, New York & London: Routledge.
- Gee, J.P.; Hull, G. & Lankshear, C. (1996)** *The new work order: Behind the language of the new capitalism*, St Leonards, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin.
- Gewirtz, S. (1998)** “Conceptualising social justice in education: Mapping the territory”, *Journal of Education Policy*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 469-484.
- Gewirtz, S. & Ball, S. (2000)** “From ‘Welfarism’ to ‘New Managerialism’: shifting discourses of school headship in the education marketplace”, *Discourse*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 253-268.
- Habermas, J. (1998)** *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. T. McCarthy, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hargreaves, A. (1994)** *Changing Teachers, Changing Times: Teachers’ Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age*, London: Cassell.
- Jarzabkowski, L. (2001)** *The primary school as an emotional arena: A case study in collegial relationships*, PhD thesis, University of Canberra.
- Kickert, W. (1991)** “Steering at a distance: A new paradigm of public governance in Dutch higher education”, paper presented to the European Consortium for Political Research, University of Essex.
- Lingard, B.; Mills, M. & Hayes, D. (2000)** “Teachers, School Reform and Social Justice: Challenging Research and Practice”, *AER*, vol. 27, no. 3, pp 99-115.
- Louis, K.S.; Kruse, D. & Marks, H.M. (1996)** “Schoolwide Professional Community”, in F. Newmann & Associates, *Authentic Achievement Restructuring Schools for Intellectual Quality*, San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

- Marginson, S. & Considine, M. (2000)** *The Enterprise University: Power, Governance and Reinvention in Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Newmann, F. & Associates (1996)** *Authentic Achievement Restructuring Schools for Intellectual Quality*, San Francisco: Josey-Bass.
- Nias, J. (1989)** *Primary Teachers Talking: A Study of Teaching as Work*, New York & London: Routledge.
- Offe, C. (1984)** *Contradictions of the Welfare State*, London: Hutchinson.
- Pocock, B.; van Wanrooy, B.; Strazzari, S. & Bridge, K. (2001)** *Fifty Families: What unreasonable hours are doing to Australians, their families and their communities*, Melbourne: ACTU.
- Robertson, S. (2000)** *A Class Act: Changing Teachers' Work, the State, and Globalization*, New York: Falmer Press.
- Sarason, S. (1971)** *The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change*, Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Smyth, J. (1993)** *A Socially Critical View of the Self Managing School*, London: Falmer Press.
- Smyth, J. (2001)** *Critical politics of teachers' work: An Australian perspective*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Taylor, S.; Rizvi, F.; Lingard, B. & Henry, M. (1997)** *Educational Policy and the Politics of Change*, London & New York: Routledge.
- Teese, R. (2000)** *Academic Success and Social Power: Examinations and Inequality*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Whitty, Geoff (1997)** "Creating Quasi-Markets in Education", in M.W. Apple (ed.), *Review of Research in Education, Volume 22*, Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Young, I.M. (1990)** *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.